



MAIN CHARACTER HIDES HIS STRENGTH

BOOK 01

Road Warrior

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Main Character Hides His Strength

(주인공이 힘을 숨김)

by

Road Warrior

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Synopsis

Enemy of the world, cursed by all, Kim Sungchul goes on a quest to prevent the 'prophecy of the end' from coming to pass.

But no matter how much he raised his strength, there were still some things he could not achieve with physical strength alone.

Resolving to obtain the power of magic, he goes into hiding to learn magic from his most hated of enemies, The Mages.

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Prologue

For the first time in his life, Devil Commander Veritas trembled in fear. It was ironic that he who has been called ‘Commander of Terror’ by all, was terrified of a lesser lifeform. The source of his newfound fear was but a mere human; Humans were insignificant existences that could be killed with a single glance, but the one before him, wielding a massive hammer, was different. Just a bit TOO different.

Over a hundred Balrog Devils were strewn across the Demon Realm floor with their skulls split open. There hadn’t been any flashy skills or spells. That stupid bastard hammered at and ripped apart all of the demons’ skulls with ease. This human, who effortlessly swept aside the guards, approached ever closer.

“W-what do you want? Human? I’ll listen to all of your...”

The massive hammer flew over like lightning and dealt a critical blow to the Devil’s goat-like skull. The Grand Devil of the Demon World’s Third Circle, Veritas’ eyes spun in separate directions.

Wham! Blam! Slam!

The torrent of blows continued, not stopping until every inch of the Grand Devil’s skull was completely flattened. The Devil perished and his army laid to waste. All that was left was the King of all Devils, Hethnius Max.

Sungchul Kim opened the gate with an insidiously inscribed

hexagram, then turned towards the Devil King's Citadel. However...

“Hm?”

On top of the blood-tinted throne was a long cold corpse. A hazy form appeared in front of the flabbergasted Sungchul. This was Hethnius Max in his ethereal form.

“Kehahahaha! You can't kill me now! Wielder of Fal Garaz.”

It was the ethereal form of the Devil King. He had voluntarily shed his corporeal form. The reason for this was simple; Sungchul was just too strong. However, there was still a limit to physical strength.

“You can't kill me now.”

Sungchul already knew this.

“...”

Physical attacks did not have any effect on ethereal targets. If the target was weak, a strong blow would be able to disperse them, but this was the Devil King. Other than a few high level spells, it could never deliver a mortal blow. Furthermore, Sungchul couldn't use magic. Rather, he had never bothered to invest in magic. Not only did he dislike magic, he even hated magicians as much as he did the devils; This was the weakness the Devil King had taken

advantage of.

“I may have lost my army, but as long as I, one of the Five Great Calamities survive, the extinction prophecy will still come to pass. As it stands, we may not be able to kill one another, but I can still crush the very world you stand upon. You may hate your own kind, but what could you ever obtain from a dead world, filled with nothing but monsters and demons?”

Listening to the taunting words of the Devil King, Sungchul thoroughly came to realize something.

‘I need Magic.’

Chapter 1 – Summoning Palace (1)

A bright light poured out of the large scale summoning portal and the night sky started to glow eerily. As he looked at the faintly lit sky, Sungchul reminisced about the time he was first summoned. That had almost been twenty years ago.

Back then, he had truly been naive and unprepared; dangers were frequent, it felt like a miracle that he had managed to survive. Now, it only took an hour for him to sweep up the trash, but the fears and frustrations within his memories were still vivid. While still deep in these memories, Sungchul delved into the sewers of the Summoning Palace.

In front of the sewers, a werewolf was standing guard.

“Grrr.... When will it end? My turn better come soon.”

A creature that was once a human, werewolves were people that had forsaken their humanity to take the feral path. Those who had a cruel and vicious nature would typically be seduced into walking this corrupted path which allowed them to quickly gain strength at the cost of having a low potential for growth.

To the werewolves whose limits were clear, they had but one joy and one purpose in their life; and that was to rip apart the newbie humans using their powerful teeth and claws. When Sungchul had first arrived at the Palace, werewolves had been one of the most aggressive and savage of enemies, but now they couldn't even survive a single punch of his.

Sungchul comfortably walked towards the werewolf from the shadows.

“Grr... Who are you!”

The werewolf guarding the waterways sniffed around and turned back angrily.

Kek!

A firm grip suddenly wrapped around the werewolf’s neck and the werewolf’s yellow eyes widened in fear.

‘W-what is this strength?!’

Unable to even cry for help, the werewolf could only watch helplessly as the mysterious human began looping a rope around his neck with one hand while holding his neck with the other.

Thump!

The werewolf struggled for a while before his body fell limp. Sungchul took out a pen and paper and wrote: ‘I can’t go on living like a dog’

“.....”

Sungchul shoved the piece of paper into the werewolf's pocket and walked deeper into the darkness of the sewers, heading towards the Palace.

After passing through the dark waterways, a brightly lit hallway appeared. Sungchul reached into his memories and directed himself towards the Summoning Plaza. There were a few guards along the way, but at their level, they wouldn't be able to feel his presence. Sungchul freely strode through until he reached the Summoning Plaza.

The plaza was filled with massive inscriptions and countless magicians who were chanting summoning incantations. It was a summoning being done on a grand scale.

This was an accursed practice where humans from a world called Earth were half-forcefully summoned here. Once, ten thousand people had been summoned to this place by a large scale summoning, but not even five hundred had managed to leave the Palace in decent shape; the rest had all either been killed under pitiful tragedies, used as magical experiments, or been sold as slaves.

There were four plazas actively practicing summoning. It was divided into: Azure, Scarlet, Blanche and Crimson. Each plaza was able to convoke approximately 2500 humans per summon. Sungchul chose to quietly hide himself at the Blanche Plaza. The Blanche Plaza had 200 summoners and mana golems, and some soldiers that were guarding the plaza. A small fairy was hopping around between them.

“Kekeke! What kind of trashy humans will be coming today? I can’t wait anymore! Trash Magicians! Hurry up, spit out the trashy humans!”

The small, ugly creature with red eyes wasn’t actually a fairy, it was a homunculus, an artificial lifeform created within a magician’s flask. They were in charge of the ‘introductory’ course for the newly summoned, and their greatest joy was looking upon the fear and dread etched into the faces of people dying. The homunculus wearing a green hat was one of these sadistic bastards, unfortunately for him, today was not his lucky day.

“Kekekeke! How should I kill these newbies to receive praise? Happy worries... Eeehh?!”

The homunculus, preoccupied with the summoning process, was suddenly pulled backwards.

“.....”

The kidnapper of the homunculus was none other than Sungchul. The homunculus’ crimson eyes were filled with horror.

‘H-how? An insignificant human dares to do this to me?!’

Homunculi might only be as large as infants, but their strength and dexterity were about five times stronger than the average adult. It wasn’t uncommon to see two homunculi tearing a human

apart. This homunculus, however, was now powerless after being captured by a seemingly average looking man.

“Hand over the quest log.”

Sungchul bluntly spat out his demand.

“Q-quest log? Do you even know where this is...?! Keeeeee!”

Act first. Ask questions later. Sungchul tore away a single leg from the homunculus, and its red blood splattered all over.

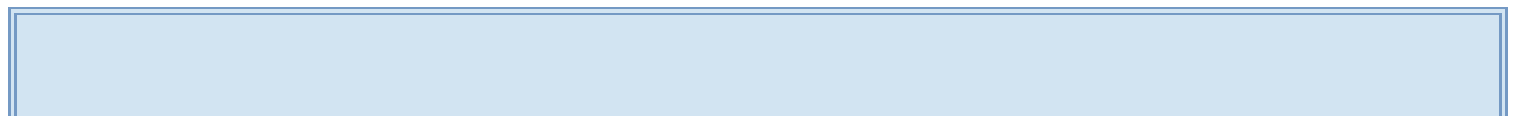
“Hand it over.”

As he spoke, he tore off another leg, it didn't matter if it died as there would be countless homunculi left to replace it, and they would only be more likely to comply if there was a dead companion present to convince them.

It spoke as Sungchul started to reach for its arm.

“I-I'll hand it over! Human, sir!”

The homunculus spat out a bright orb from his flapping gullet, and a phrase popped up as Sungchul grabbed it.



[Obtained Summoning Plaza's Quest Log!]

[Would you like to see the Quest Log?]

With a simple nod, words began to fill Sungchul's vision.

[Summoning Plaza's Quest Log]

Charismatic Person – After being summoned, introduce yourself to more than 10 people within 10 minutes. / Reward – Fire Seed

Sports Man – Within 3 days of being summoned, perform 300 sit ups and 3 hours of running / Reward – Strengthening Dumbbells

Cook – Using more than 3 types of food provided by the Summoning Palace's Quests, prepare a meal. / Reward – White Bread (Ration) x 3

...

All the quests and their requirements provided by the Summoning Palace were written concisely within the orb taken from the homunculus. Sungchul carefully sifted through all the quests to find those that were necessary to him.

Observant – Read aloud the inscription posted at the main entrance. / Reward: Intuition +1

‘I have to raise intuition. Especially because of those curses.’

As he resumed searching for more quests, he could hear a pained voice beside him.

“H-human, sir. Y-you’re letting me go now, right? It h-hurts.”

It was the legless homunculus. The reply was... Crunch! A quick mercy. Sungchul tossed the limp corpse into the air. There were blood stains left behind, but that didn’t matter. It would all soon be covered over with human blood anyways.

“Are these all regular? There is no log here of any hidden quests.”

Considering that it was a low-level homunculus, this was a decent find. Sungchul retreated, back into the dark to wait for his next opportunity.

Soon, modern humans suddenly appeared from the bright lights of the magic seal. They had just been summoned.

“Where am I?”

“What... What happened?”

Having been pulled out of their comfortable, civilized world, they inspected their new surroundings with innocent and confused

faces. However, there was no time for them to be surprised.

All the magicians and the guards filed out, and only the rough looking homunculi remained to face the humans.

“Kekekekek! Humans! Welcome to the Field of Judgement!”

The people didn't know what to make of these infant-sized creatures who were hopping about and shouting. Some of them looked around blankly, some kept bashing at their phones, others kept badgering another with questions. Each person's reaction might have been different, but the crises facing them were all the same.

Sungchul who had slipped in amongst the crowd, quietly waiting for a message.

‘Will... it succeed?’

He, who has been exiled from all of the circles and made enemies with every magician, has never had the opportunity to learn magic. If there was a way to learn magic by beating out the knowledge from a mage, he would have tried it by now. But to learn magic he first had to figure out which of the classes were the most suited to him, which wasn't as easy as it sounded.

Along with precise planning and some luck, he would need to find an altar, and a skilled mage who could breathe life into that altar. It wasn't difficult for him to crush a kingdom, but if

someone was to find out that he was trying to learn magic, all the mage circles would put their lives on the line to stop him. Those people were the craziest of fanatics; they put their reputation even above their lives.

The only way Sungchul could think of to sneak into a unique place that offered free classes, like the Summoning Palace. If one could receive the Summoning Palace quest, there would be an opportunity for them to learn magic. He wasn't sure if it would work, but this was the safest gamble he could think of. Suddenly, a message appeared before Sungchul's anticipating eyes.

[Welcome to the Summoning Palace.]

[Summoning Palace's Quest will now begin.]

[Battle will soon commence, please be prepared.]

It happened. The Summoning Palace's quest had been triggered. In his mind, Sungchul was celebrating when another message appeared.

[Warning! You could die.]

“Me? Die?”

His lips curved into a cynical smile.

Chapter 2 – Summoning Palace (2)

The iron gates on the walls surrounding the plaza opened and some alien creature squirmed through. A man with particularly good sight spoke with uncertainty.

“Is that a mantis?”

The man’s guess was correct. However, there was no way that something as simple as that would appear in the Blanche plaza. What had really appeared was a man-eating mantis, standing at the height of an adult male. There was a swarm of them numbering in the hundreds.

“Now! Trashy humans! Weapons are going to start appearing. Pick one! Fight... or run! If you don’t do either... kekeke! You can just let yourself be eaten!”

The homunculi began dancing as they taunted them. The crowd still stood frozen in uncertainty, but Sungchul was different. With callous eyes, he patiently waited for the arrival of the weapons. A worn blade suddenly appeared in the air.

< Blade of Beginnings >

Grade: Common – Lowest Grade

Class: Blade

Effect: None

Note: Wield and fight. Die. Or Kill.

“It has been a while since I’ve used a blade.”

He had been solely using his hammer for quite a while now. This didn’t mean he couldn’t use a blade. Sungchul’s mastery level with a blade was at the Master rank. It fell short of the ‘greatest’ ranking of Grand Master, but it wouldn’t be wrong to say he was humanity’s strongest swordsman.

Sungchul hid amidst the rumbling crowd and observed the transparent beings that were meandering above their heads. They were transparent, but their bloodshot eyes clearly were of a summoner’s. Most people wouldn’t be able to notice it under its invisibility spell, but such illusion spells were just parlor tricks to Sungchul.

‘That must be the Observer’s eye. Did they already start filtering people out?’

Sungchul could see a large observation tower above the walls surrounding the plaza. The bastards who held power in this part of the world were sitting in that tower. They were watching through the Observer’s eye for any seeds or ‘special talents’ they could nurture. But at this point, it was still too early for them to tell, so they were mostly just watching the people who had a relation to the higher ups.

As if on cue, the Observer’s eye focused on those special individuals. This was a sort of privilege bestowed upon them.

‘The Observer’s eye are all enchanted with low-level repellent spell. I suppose it could avoid trash mobs like those man-eating mantises.’

Some of the Observer’s Eyes were held over the men and women who stood out from the rest of the crowd. These eyes were the property of the slave traders. Most likely, they would appear at a critical moment, trying to enforce a brutal contract on them that would place their lives as collateral.

“Now, now! Trashy humans! The game will begin!”

The homunculus with the red hat was hopping over to the humans. There was one man who walked over to the homunculus.

“Hey! What the fuck are you? Huh?”

It was a relatively muscular man in his mid-20s who also seemed quite agile. He must have used his fist quite a bit in the old world, but this was the Other World, old ways of thinking did not apply here.

“Trashy human? You have something you want to say to me?”

The homunculus with the red hat tottered along and asked. The man, seemingly full of energy, suddenly booted the Homunculus. However, the kick carrying all of his weight was easily grabbed by the Homunculus’ baby-like hands.

“Uh...? Huh?!”

The man’s eyes only briefly reflected the horror welling up inside him before the surrounding homunculi gathered like vultures and each happily held onto a limb. The man desperately tried to swing his blade, but it was all to no avail.

“H-hey! Let go of me! Shit!”

“Trashy human, struggling without knowing your place! Time for a lesson~!”

Red Hat smiled viciously as he spoke.

“This place is OUR playground! Break our rules, and this is what happens!”

The homunculi snickered while tearing the man’s limbs apart.

“KYAAAAAAA!”

The man’s limbs were torn apart, accompanied by a sickening scream. A woman’s shrill scream followed shortly after, leaving everyone in silent horror. The homunculi soaked in the terror of the humans and spoke out arrogantly, “From now on. You must all listen to what we tell you. Run over to that door with all your strength! Or else Mister Mantis is going to make a tasty meal out of

you!”

The seal around the plaza fell away. The starving mantis swarm suddenly perked up. The humans finally understood the fate that awaited them. There was a desperate cry, followed by pandemonium. A huge group of 2500 people all bolted towards the door. Everyone pushed and shoved until the weakest of them were trampled to death. Sungchul calmly made his way through the chaos and towards the front of the crowd. This was all a familiar sight to him.

The Homunculus’ repertoire hadn’t changed a bit. There will still be an unwelcome surprise waiting for them at the exit.

“Kwuuuuuh!”

A hand shot out from the exit followed by a creature shaped like a human. It was a ghoul, a zombie-like creature that sought human flesh but retained its consciousness. But their hunger still prevailed over their sense of reason.

The starved ghouls became frenzied at the sight of fresh, living humans. They caught the most athletic of them, who were at the front of the crowd and started eating them alive. At the traumatizing scene taking place before them, those at the front came grinding to a halt. However, the herd of 2000 didn’t stop with them. The people at the back continued pushing, while those at the front continued screaming, “Don’t push! Don’t push!”

Those facing the ghouls held the crowd back with all their

strength, but in the end, they were slowly being pushed forward inch by inch, until they too were grabbed by the ghouls.

“KYAAAAA!”

“So... hungry...! HUNGRY!”

Accompanied by the screams of their victims, the ghouls began to feast. Not only that, there was another stronger, even more terrifying predator hunting those who had fallen behind.

“D-dear!”

A middle-aged man feebly tried to defend his wife with his blade, but a beginner was no match for the man-eating mantis.

Clang!

The mantis’ foreleg shattered the blade and snatched up the despairing survivor.

Crunch! Crunch!

The homunculus smiled contently to the music of it chewing on flesh and bone.

“That’s why you have to run faster! You slowpokes, lazing about

leads to this! Kehehe!”

It was a scene comparable to hell, but all of this failed to affect Sungchul. To him, there was a greater objective to be accomplished; and that was to read the inscription that was at the front gate.

“... Death will set you free.”

[You are a possessor of sharp observation. You have astutely observed the inscription written at the front gate, and completed Observant (Common)]

Reward – Intuition +1

The first quest had been completed. However, it was still far from over.

[Oh Ho! What a nice guy! You have completed Samaritan (Common) by helping 3 people who have fallen over.]

Reward – Apple x2

[Even in the bleakest of moments, you are a true romantic

who would still stare at the two moons longingly! Romanticist (Common) has been completed.]

Reward – Palace Token x1

Even in the process of escaping, he was able to finish a few trivial quests. Things like the apples were earned at Sungchul's leisure, but the Palace Token was the most important item within the Palace Quest. It was through the number of Palace Tokens that classes could be chosen. One would have to feverishly collect if they wanted to take one of the hidden classes, but Sungchul only wanted the common mage class. He could easily collect 9 of the 10 tokens with little trouble. Trying any harder would only garner the attention of the large guilds and sects.

'I guess I should get about 15 tokens to be safe. Either way, I should finally open up my status screen, now that I've managed to get some intuition.'

In this brief moment, A ghoul rushed towards Sungchul. He reflexively swiped across the ghoul's skull with the back of his blade. However, he forgot to control his strength. The ghoul's skull managed to pierce through the reinforced floor.

"Shit."

He tried to hold back, but it was still too strong. It couldn't be helped. His physical strength had exceeded the superhuman and could be ranked within the realms of divinity.

‘There is definitely a need for me to conceal my strength. By a lot.’

Thankfully, his action went completely unnoticed, no one had any attention to spare for him. That was only natural, this was the arena of survival where preserving one’s life was difficult enough, without having to worry about what someone else was doing.

The end slowly came into sight. The homunculi were waving blood-soaked cloths while shouting over people. Those that finished felt as if they were both suffocating physically and mentally. Sungchul softly muttered ‘status screen’ under his breath. Overall, the status screen of newcomers would be pathetic beyond compare. It wouldn’t be rare for it to be filled with just some meager stats and nothing else. This wasn’t the case for Sungchul. His status screen unfolded like a legendary epic.

<Current Status of Kim Sungchul, ‘The One Who Crushes’>

[Blessings]

Covenant

(Unknown)

Unshakeable

(Immune to Mental Attacks)

Blessing from God of Chaos

(10% Bonus to Strength, Dexterity, Vitality)

Heir of Heracles

(+100 Strength)

Bloodline of Zealot

(Major Bonus to Regeneration when Below 10% Vitality)

Champion of Humanity

(+ 50 Resolve)

Rapid-Bow of the High Elven Kingdom

(+ 30 Dexterity)

Heart of an Ancient Warrior

(+5 Strength, Resolve, Vitality / Resilience)[Curses]

Covenant

(Unknown)

Final Declaration of Grand Mage Balzark

(-10 Intuition)

Blessing of Blademaster Karakardra

(+ 1 Dexterity, -1 Strength)

Ancient God's Champion, Arrak – Garr's Criticism
(-3 Strength)

Dark Dragon Groteus's Karmic Curse
(- 20 Strength, -20 Vitality)

Adelwight of the Haunted Forest's Common Curse
(- 5 Strength, Erectile Dysfunction)

Enemy of the Kingdom
(Faction: Nemesis of Human Kingdom, Blank Check Reward)

Destroyer of Hora Mountain Sect
(Faction: Nemesis of Hora Mountain Sect, Destroyed)

Destroyer of Mewra Sect
(Faction: Nemesis of Mewra Sect, Destroyed)

Enemy of the Coalition of Mages
(Faction: Nemesis of Coalition of Mages and affiliated guilds)

Steel Fist Curse of Crimson Orc Chief, Drakuul
(Race: -30 Orc Favor)

Recorded on Dwarven Log of Villains

(Race: -200 Dwarf Favor)

Recorded on Merchant Coalition Blacklist

(Faction: Trade impossible with Merchant coalition and their affiliated factions)

“.....”

Too long. It would take ages to read completely down to the class screen. This was why he had avoided opening his status screen before. There also hadn’t been any need to.

Sungchul sifted through the tightly packed lines of words to find what he was really looking for.

‘Ability power, class and soul contracts’

[Class]

Main Class – Primordial Warrior (Legendary)

Sub Class – High Class Chef (Rare)

[Stats]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Vitality 801 Magic Power 3

Intuition -9 Magic Resist 611

Resolve 501 Charisma 18

Luck 18

[Soul Contract – 6 Slots]

Soul Harvester

([Legend] Vitality Leech 15%, Vitality restored from fallen enemies)

Thunder Shield

([Legend] All Magic Damage reduced by 50% / Negate all mental attacks below legend rank)

Eye of Truth

([Legend] Negate all blessings below Epic rank / Identify all items, consumables, and skill details)

Soul Storage

([Epic] Can store 1500 different items)

Deceiver's Veil

([Rare – High Tier] Conceals status window)

With the comparably lighter data, Sungchul first looked over the classes.

‘I suppose mage should be slotted to the sub class. I haven’t really messed around with it like some other people.’

Sungchul then looked over his 5th soul contract, Deceiver’s Veil. Soul contracts were, as the name suggested, an agreement where a

deity or a similar being inscribes some of their power into the user's soul. Each of these contracts were exceedingly difficult to obtain, but they also granted significant power.

Deceiver's veil effectively deceived other users. It hid the user's strength, but also their name. It was something essential for an unreasonably powerful loner with more enemies than friends like Sungchul.

‘I should play around a bit when I get the chance.’

He finally looked over his stats, or more importantly, his intuition.

‘Intuition is -9. That curse from the geezer, Balzark, is holding me back now.’

The image of an old man covered in countless inscriptions, spouting curses while being turned into tenderized meat flashed through his mind. Intuition was a core stat for a mage, going along with their magic power. Magic power represented a magician's destructive strength and their mana retention, while intuition was related to their understanding of the higher tier magic. No matter how high your magical power was, without sufficient intuition one could never learn high tier spells. As far as he could recall, the Mage class required at least 10 intuition.

‘It is critical that I raise my intuition, but the limit for common quests is 10. I could raise strength by 23, but why is there so little room for intuition?’

It hadn't been planned, but a need for hidden quests arose. However, he didn't know the requirements for triggering any of the hidden quests within the Summoning Palace. He had only managed to get his hands on the common quest log. It wasn't like there was another way...

Sungchul searched for the most leisurely among the survivors. He found one. One with the Observer's Eye floating above. In other words, 'a shoe-in'. A way would appear if he trailed him. A way to uncover a hidden quest.

Chapter 3 – Forsaken Cathedral (1)

The homunculi gathered around the survivors and began counting their numbers.

“How many of the trash survived? At a quick glance... Keke! Around 1500?”

Among the homunculi, there was one that was abnormally large. He wore a white hat and as the leader of the homunculi he called himself the Drill Sergeant. All of the homunculi gathered around him.

“There are exactly 1534 heads!”

“Tsk! Not even reduced by half? Such a disappointment, however, I am a benevolent homunculus.”

The Drill Sergeant’s tone was not only shrill and cracked, but also loud, so it had no problems reaching its audience. It sounded unpleasant, but it still bore through into the ears. Sungchul also had to listen to his voice.

‘Is it the same guy from 25 years ago? He’s still alive.’

The Homunculi usually lived short lives. Not only were they treated harshly by their masters, they were often also cannibalized by their fellows. It seems that this homunculus had used his large stature to survive for this long.

“Now! Now! Trashy humans! This gracious Drill Sergeant shall bestow a great benevolence upon you. This is a week of rest! Please use this week well to adjust to this new world!”

The homunculi filed out after the Drill Sergeant.

This announcement snapped the people into conversation.

“W-where is this? Just where is this?”

“My phone... There is no signal, not even wifi.”

“This is a dream... it has to be a dream...”

Most of the summoned tried to conform to their surroundings so that they could preserve their sanity. So meaningless, the smart ones will approach the problem realistically and tackle it a step at a time.

‘This week isn’t a gift, but a death sentence.’

There were no rations or water in this place. Only people. Other than the wall protecting them from the demonic creatures, there were no merits to staying in this place. People would have to venture beyond the walls to survive. Or they would have to eat other people.

Sungchul stuck with the crowd and observed the situation. A short while later, a few people started to move. They moved in a way that could be considered erratic in the eyes of a normal person. Some circled the plaza and others pretended to swing a blade in the air. Normally people would think that they had lost it, but Sungchul saw things differently. There was an Observer's Eye on top of each one of these 'lunatics' without exception. They were getting their instructions through the summoner, and being taught how to survive through the situation. While others were frozen in inactivity, these small quests would quickly add up and make a critical difference in the end. There were also some proactive normal people.

“Excuse me. Are you by yourself?”

A middle-aged man in a ragged suit made his way through the crowd to form a group. He had worked through everyone who had ignored him, insulted him, or refused him to gather ten people. Watching that man, Sungchul began recalling an old memory.

‘Thinking back there are those kinds too. Spouting annoying nonsense like, ‘a bundle of sticks is harder to break’ to gather people.’

A particular woman's silhouette came into mind and his eyes grew cold. But there was no more time for him to soak in the past. Sungchul quickly followed the group of twenty walking past the plaza walls. There was one person in the background who thoughtlessly called out to him.

“H-hey.”

Sungchul's eyes slid over to the voice.

“Got any cigs?”

“ ... ”

Sungchul didn't even bother acknowledging him any further.

Past the walls, there was a forest deeply steeped in demonic energy that was awaiting them. It was home to the demonic creatures. Those with the Observer's Eye were the first who dared to cross the barrier. They weren't just the average 'pre-selected' either, if one were to look at their large number.

‘They must have the backing of a large guild.’

The Summoning Palace was a neutral faction under the protection of the God of Order.

Any single group with power wouldn't be allowed to freely abuse their authority. To influence the Palace, it would require greasing every palm and that would be no small sum of wealth. It would take a major faction to bring several dozen officials under their sway. All of these points meant that this group was exactly what Sungchul had been looking for. He nonchalantly slipped into their group. The younger men and women gave him a glance before ignoring him completely.

In this awkward silence, two more people joined the group.

“25 people... I think that’s everyone.”

A stylish man in a suit was the first to speak out; everyone focused their attention on him. It must have been nerve-wracking, but he still continued calmly.

“I apologize if I seem forward, but that’s just how it is. My name is Yuhoon Lee.”

He received a reasonable response from the group. Everyone other than a squinty-eyed man with bleached hair seemed to welcome his attempt at breaking the ice. Yuhoon continued to direct the crowd after gaining their approval.

“Can everyone hear their guide’s voice?”

Everyone’s head nodded in response.

“....”

Sungchul also calmly nodded his head and continued to observe their Observer’s Eye. There were slight differences in their shapes. It represented each individual summoner’s magic. At this moment, Sungchul’s eyes flashed with a strange light.

‘Some annoying magicians are involved this time. They probably

tapped into their candidate's sight and hearing.'

However, the magicians that Sungchul was involved with usually had 'High Rank' attached to their titles. The necromancers he would chase down on his average day could conjure up thousands of undead on their own. Compared to magicians of their caliber, these summoners would be apprentices at best.

'Not bad. I should stick with these guys.'

By Sungchul's expectation, there would be hidden quests attached to the training course prepared for these 24 people.

"First off, my guide has notified me that time is very precious. There is no time for us to dawdle. After a brief introduction, I believe we should quickly move on with whatever our guides have directed us to do."

Yuhoon approached the people around him first, casually introduced himself and enticed a friendly atmosphere. No one approached Sungchul, and that was because of his unkempt appearance. It was extremely difficult to obtain decent clothes in the Other World, much less stylish ones. He had tried relatively hard, but he currently only wore some worn out military fatigues like some sort of homeless veteran. He also hadn't had any hygiene products with which to wash for a while now, so he didn't smell too great either.

The teenager in hip-hop clothing and the 20s something women covered in brand-name products spoke with their backs towards

him. It was a clear sign of rejection.

“ ... ”

Sungchul didn't particularly mind. There were no benefits in him caring about that, all he wanted were the hidden quests. However, someone noticed him from afar and approached him.

“Hey mister, why are you standing here alone?”

He looked up wondering who it might have been. It was Lee Yuhoon. He spoke with a wide smile maintaining eye contact and a hand outreached for a shake.

‘What a trained courtesy.’

He had dealt with a lot of people before. A clear instinct told him that Yuhoon might not be as friendly as he appears, but he accepted the handshake anyways.

“Just Kim. Please call me Kim.”

“Then, we'll have to compromise with using Mister Kim.”

When introductions ended, an eerie glow emitted from deep within the forest. The group slowly gathered together and turned towards the light.

“Kekekeke....”

It was a familiar laugh. Not unexpectedly, a homunculus revealed himself from the darkness. The glow was coming from the lantern he held in his hand.

“You have already gathered here, humans!”

Sungchul recognized this homunculus by his voice.

‘Drill Sergeant.’

He was significantly larger than the average homunculus, and also revealed a significantly more sinister set of razorlike teeth as he greeted the group. He stood at the height of everyone’s stomachs, but they all understood just how savage and powerful this midget-like creature could be. How could they dare look down on the larger Drill Sergeant?

The Drill Sergeant reveled in the humans’ fears and smiled gleefully as he looked over them.

“Do not fear, please! Humans! This Drill Sergeant is but a smart homunculus! I have senselessly killed those trashy humans, but to the selected few, I will be willing to grant a service..”

The Drill Sergeant tottered back through the forest with his lantern in hand.

“Follow closely, please! Humans! You might just die to some monsters if you fall behind! Kekeke!”

Everyone stood flabbergasted at this situation.

“I think we can follow him. That’s what my voice is telling me.”

Yuhoon lead the way in following after the homunculus. The others also followed after their impromptu leader helplessly. Only two people stayed in their place.

“Ah, shit. I really don’t like that bitch.”

The Yankee spat out a quick bit of profanity before following. Sungchul quietly moved after him.

—

The homunculus lead the group to an abandoned cathedral. On top of the cathedral’s steeple there stood a rectangular ornament, this was the symbol for the God of Order. The God of Order was one of the five gods that ruled over the pantheon.

“Come in, please! Humans!”

The Drill Sergeant stepped in first. The rectangular ornament filled with a strange light as he stepped into the cathedral.

“Woah... What? This...” disparate words of admiration spilled out from the group.

There were sarcophagi with open lids within the cathedral. There were 25 in total.

“Now. Now. Humans! Don’t dawdle and step into whichever one that suits your fancy, please!” Homunculus spoke with a smirk.

One by one, everyone eventually began lying within the sarcophagi. Kim Sungchul also found one somewhere in the middle and laid down. The sarcophagi began levitating with power, and the lids closed shut on its own. They could clearly see bright letters floating within the suffocating darkness that surrounded them.

[You have found the martyr’s sarcophagi and laid down with resolute hearts.]

[Determination of the martyr uplifts your body.]

Effect: +10 Strength, Dexterity, Vitality (Region Restriction: Summoning Palace)

Chapter 4 – Forsaken Cathedral (2)

In essence, this was a buff for beginners; just that it didn't seem very balanced. An average healthy adult male would have a strength of 6. What would happen if you added 10 to this number? Even the most feeble of woman would easily exceed the boundary of a human's limitations.

A strange light flashed across Sungchul's eyes.

'I've heard stories, but I never imagined that the Preselected would get this much of an advantage.'

He was one of the original summoned. Delicate dandies like the 'Preselected' hadn't existed back then; everyone had to spend each day crawling together through the depths of hell. He knew that everyone who had survived had gotten through by their strength and their luck. In that way, it had been truly equal. Those who couldn't manage, died. What Sungchul had witnessed in this cathedral now threw all of that out the window.

"Now! Now! Wake up! Great humans!"

They saw a pile of weapons and rations that had been prepared in front of the sarcophagi. There was only a week's worth of food and weapons that looked similar to the basic ones already provided. Everyone looked confused, but Sungchul had already spotted the difference.

'These are enchanted weapons.'

Physically identical weapons would have a drastically different performance when enchanted. This impact was more drastic for lower grade weapons like the ones they had been provided with at the start. These weapons were a world's difference to the ones the group was currently equipped with.

“Now now, humans! Throw away those trash weapons you are carrying, and take hold of these new weapons, please! These are 10 times better!”

They hesitantly exchanged their old weapons for the new ones.

“Woah! They look the same, but I think the new ones seem better somehow.”

“Yea, don't they feel lighter... and stronger?”

The Drill Sergeant saw the delighted eyes of the group and spoke even louder with his usual grating voice.

“You selected few! You are protected! I, Drill Sergeant, shall dedicate myself in guiding every one of you in safely passing through the tribulations of this Summoning Palace!”

The members began relaxing and smiling after hearing these words. They had completely accepted his words that they were some sort of chosen existences.

“Everyone. We will soon return to the plaza! There is no need to fear! You have obtained a few powers beyond that of those trashy humans! Kekeke!”

The Drill Sergeant’s words bolstered the group’s pride. Laughter could be heard from the people, but Sungchul saw a faint light approaching the group. It was another lantern. This lantern was held by a single Homunculus who was leading a single person in this direction.

“Huuuuh? What’s that?”

The Drill Sergeant revealed his razorlike teeth as he questioned the other homunculus.

“Manager! There is another chosen human!”

“What? Chosen human...?!”

The Drill Sergeant’s eyes lit up with a crimson light.

“There are already 25 people here. What’s happened here? Assistant!”

The Drill Sergeant began huffing and threateningly approached the smaller homunculus before it replied fearfully.

“T-that is... The human said he needed to take a shit first, so he

was late.”

“Shit...? Does that even make sense?”

The Drill Sergeant drew close to the newly arrived human and glared at him. He was a 20-year-old male and with a decent appearance and a balanced physique. He must have been extremely friendly; because he continued smiling even as the Drill Sergeant was fuming before his face. A few of the women started observing him closely.

“Anyways, it’s impossible! All the Buffs of the Martyrs and the overpowered weapons have already been distributed to the 25 people gathered here. Those who are tardy have no right to get anything!”

The Drill Sergeant crushed a candy while shaking his head in anger. However, the small homunculus’ face now started to pale.

“B-but Manager... this human... is not average.”

“What do you mean? Assistant?”

“This human is someone directly chosen by the Order of the Iron Blood Knights’ Head Captain!”

“O-Order of the Iron Blood Knights?!”

The Drill Sergeant jumped up in surprise. He was so surprised that even the candy flew out of his mouth.

‘Order of the Iron Blood Knights, huh.’

Sungchul recognized the name. Once they had been the frontline defence of humanity against the demonic forces. But currently, they have been corrupted and instead became the shield of the elites. An image of the Knight Captain’s stubborn, stripe bearded face flashed through his mind.

“Hey, you call yourself the Drill Sergeant, right? Don’t be so stiff; I haven’t really adjusted to this world yet.”

The tardy guy finally opened his mouth. There wasn’t a speck of him trying to confront the Drill Sergeant. He passed by the flabbergasted Drill Sergeant and began smiling and warmly shaking hands with the rest of the group.

“Hello, everyone? Sorry I’m late, my name is Park Ahram. As you can see, I am a ‘Preselected’ just like you all.”

This was an astounding display of self-confidence and adaptability. He had already determined his status within this new society and was now making full use of it. He clearly knew that no matter what he said, the Drill Sergeant could not touch him.

The Drill Sergeant was shaking in rage, but he only continued to savagely chew an ever increasing amount of hard candies. He

eventually came and stood before the 25 of them other than Ahram.

“Among you, there is a bad boy that has deceived this Drill Sergeant. Please come forward now. Before this Drill Sergeant becomes very angry.”

The people in the group continued looking at each other and exchanged suspicion filled gazes. Sungchul met two distinct gazes himself. They were the hip-hop boy and the brand-name girl he had met in the beginning.

“Isn’t it that person?”

“I think so too.”

The two eventually stood before Sungchul

“Hey, hobo.”

The Hip-hop boy took on an aggressive tone with Sungchul.

“It’s you, isn’t it? Everyone can see that.”

Sungchul laughed to himself as the kid glared at him with arrogance in his eyes.

‘I guess I must look like I’m a pushover.’

The Drill Sergeant’s grating voice once again punched at their ears.

“Hey, you. Why did you raise your hand?”

Drill Sergeant was looking at Lee Yuhoon.

“Are you confessing that you’re the rat?”

Yuhoon’s shoulders fell away at the Drill Sergeant’s murderous tone.

“No.”

“Then why did you raise your hand?”

“I’m not sure of the exact circumstance, but if I understand correctly, someone among us wasn’t Preselected to be here, is that right?”

Drill Sergeant nodded. Yuhoon, with a voice markedly more pleasant than the Drill Sergeant’s, continued speaking softly towards the crowd.

“The one guiding me has provided a wonderful suggestion. We

could reveal the name of our guides.

A very primitive method, but an effective one. There was an Observer's Eye above all of the Preselected. The Observer's Eyes could only relay the voice of the magician to their candidate and were invisible to one another. But this wouldn't matter if their candidate relayed the information. Only the Preselected would be able to answer this question. There was no room for collaboration.

“For reference, the name of the person guiding me is Leonis!”

Yuhoon was the first to reveal his hand, which was the conservative and smart choice.

The Drill Sergeant, who had been shaking in rage, quickly started smiling grotesquely.

“There, human! Truly brilliant! You have earned points in this Drill Sergeant's books! That is a great honor!”

Yuhoon simply scratched his head and smiled sheepishly.

‘That guy....’

Sungchul began to suspect whether the idea had actually come from the guiding mage or from Yuhoon himself. Thick headed interns wouldn't be able to think up such an idea on the fly like that.

“My guide’s name is Dolores Winterer? She says she is on a different level than average magicians!”

Ahram followed up with a raucous laughter. The Drill Sergeant ignored him and continued asking in progression.

“Human, your guide’s name?”

“Choi Hweyun.”

One by one, the group revealed their guide’s names, and the small homunculus followed behind the Drill Sergeant and recorded them on a sheepskin. When half the group was done, the young pair standing beside Sungchul started glaring at him once more.

“Hey, hobo. Trying to bounce now? That monster is going to split you in half when he finds out you clowned him, ya know.”

“Is that right?”

Sungchul replied calmly. However, he wasn’t looking at the kid, he was actually focusing on the Observer’s Eye above him.

‘Should I try taking that...’

It was just a simple construct. Its primary method of transmission should only be a simple kind of telepathy with the

closest individual.

“Then I’ll stand in front of you.”

As he spoke, his right hand moved; it moved at a speed faster than anyone could notice and grabbed the Observer’s Eye above the kid’s head.

-Don’t fight with other Preselected... Don’t fight...

Telepathy flowed in. It was a pathetic telepathy that sounded weak and distant.

“Why are you standing in front of me?”

The kid, who hadn’t even realized that his Observer’s Eye had been stolen, began glaring at him once more. Sungchul feigned weakness and lowered his gaze, and kid smirked victoriously.

“Can’t wait to die can you? I won’t stop you.”

The brand-name girl and the kid continued chattering behind him. It was as though they were celebrating Sungchul’s imminent death. However, they could never imagine the reason his right hand would be gripping so strongly. It was almost as though he was holding onto something.

“Why does everything look so strange.... What... is there a

problem...?”

Primitive telepathy from the Observer’s Eye continued buzzing in. Sungchul quietly reflected on this new revelation about the Preselected.

‘Now that I think about it, none of these people actually ever talked to the Observer’s Eye.’

His gaze fell on the distant Drill Sergeant and the woman in front of him.

“Elipas... is the name.”

The woman, including Yuhoon, never seemed to be speaking to themselves but rather would reply very quickly. That meant there was only one method of communicating through this telepathy, a very strong mental thought.

‘What is your name?’

Sungchul leaked a concise and strong thought through the Observer’s Eye. A reply soon followed.

“Didn’t I tell you before...? My name is Krill... Krill Regall....”

Krill Regall. As soon as he heard the name, Sungchul threw the Observer’s Eye into the air. It didn’t go far before a small explosion

happened, followed by a splattering of blood, but no one seemed to have noticed this. Now it was Sungchul's turn.

“Umm... the human with colorful clothing! State the name of your guiding magician!”

The Drill Sergeant revealed his razor teeth and demanded an answer.

“Krill. Krill Regall.”

The hip-hop boy's face crumbled at the mention of that name.

“What... What did you say?”

It was only natural to be surprised. It was the name he was going to claim. However, the Drill Sergeant wasn't interested in fair trials or who was truly guilty. He stood indifferently in front of the boy with the stolen name and demanded an answer.

“Hey you! Human with earrings! State your guiding magician's name!”

“U-um...”

The hip-hop boy was soaked in cold sweat. He finally pointed at Sungchul and began shouting.

“That fucker! He said my magician’s name!”

“What? Human?”

The Drill Sergeant and the small homunculus with the paper and pen both tilted their heads.

“No... shit. That fucker! He said my magician’s name before I could! Krill Regall was mine!”

There was no one here, and no homunculus who was willing to listen to him. The Drill Sergeant lifted the hip-hop boy by the collar with his pudgy hands.

“Got him! The rat! I finally found the criminal!”

“No...! It’s not me!”

Sungchul looked indifferently at the boy being dragged off, and quietly erected his middle finger. Finally, the boy understood what had just transpired, but by now it was much too late.

“H-hey!!!”

The boy was soon torn apart by the grip of the two homunculi. His pitiful screaming rang eerily throughout the forsaken cathedral.

Chapter 5 – Nightmare Of Vestiare (1)

It's been four days since the mass summoning, and an unpleasant energy was circling the Blanche plaza. 1500 people were busy stewing in the stench of rotting flesh without any food or water. There were no conversations, just constant glares from across the plaza.

Riiiip!

The sound of plastic rustled from one corner of the plaza. Several hundred pairs of eyes shot towards the man that was pulling something from his clothes. It was just an empty cigarette carton.

“Anyone... Anyone have some cigs...?”

The man kept asking with hollow eyes even as his voice was growing taut. A few of the men standing nearby spat out profanities as they started beating him up. Nobody tried to stop them, not even his pitiful screams could stir up any sort of reaction.

After the beating was finished, the man kept on uttering as he lay on the ground.

“C-cigarettes, please...”

Sungchul unconsciously recognized the face. It was the face of the idiotic kid who had asked for some cigs on the first day.

Looking at the kid's crooked nose and his bruised eyes, he calculated that the kid probably had two more days left at most. It would be difficult for him to make it past the day. His spirit looked to be even more dead than his body was.

Sungchul only thought about how this would be the best outcome, then refocused on his objectives.

‘In the end, I didn’t manage to find any hidden quests.’

There weren’t any more gatherings of the Preselected after they left the forsaken cathedral. It was completely beneath his expectations; he had hoped that at least some individual preselected would be called away, but none of them had moved. The most he could do was take notice of how they would gather during the day.

They had claimed the northern corner of the plaza and the training center within. The preselected were inside, training with the practice and spinning dummies. There were also ordinary people who were pointing at and mocking them as if they were lunatics.

“Tsk tsk. There’s nothing to eat, and they’re just wasting their energy. They’re just asking for death.”

“They gone crazy is all. Those idiots.”

These people were just ignorant. The preselected would quickly

grow strong inside the training center.

“Haha, the sound of your fist on the dummy is becoming crisp! How much strength do you have now?”

“22 now. The sound’s changed after I’ve hit 20.”

“I haven’t hit 20 yet. I gotta try harder myself!”

The small yet distinct gap was starting to widen. This would become a critical factor to them during the future crisis.

Punch. Punch.

Sungchul thoughtlessly punched a dummy in the corner of the training center and continued with his eavesdropping. There were two people worth taking notice of in this group.

Lee Yuhoon: A natural-born leader, who would charm any person with his wit and his calm voice that even an announcer would envy.

And then Park Ahram: He had arrived conspicuously even on his first day, and revealed himself to be backed by one of the most powerful factions. He had already proven his authority over the Drill Sergeant. He was more noteworthy than the former, with his powerful background, the chances of him being granted a hidden quest was quite large. The problem was, Ahram seemed to be more interested in his sexual conquests than in any sort of hidden quest.

“Do you have a boyfriend? It looks like you might have one... but maybe not anymore? Keke”

He didn't even pretend to be training, he avoided any form of labor, including hitting the dummies. He became even more of a bother with his endless supply of pickup lines. The women who were interested at first due to his powerful supporter and mysterious entrance quickly turned him away due to his lecherous and flighty attitude.

“Ah... why does everyone hate me? It's a short life anyway, I might as well enjoy it while I can.”

He was eventually turned away by all of the preselected women and now turned to women outside of the group. Their faces all looked tired and despondent, but some still retained their former beauty. He began drooling lecherously as he held his rations under his arms.

“Ah... what should I do? What am I to do?”

Sungchul thought that he looked as though he was an animal in heat, who had been stuck in a pit and realized he would likely cause an accident soon. Sungchul didn't have to wait for long, Ahram left with a pretty young thing beyond the wall, but he only returned alone. Only Sungchul knew what had really transpired.

“....”

Within an isolated area covered in foliage, there was the corpse of a naked woman. Sungchul acknowledged it with indifferent eyes. There was a distinct handprint around her neck region. She had died from asphyxiation. The most incriminating piece of evidence was the slight bit of blood and skin embedded underneath her nails. There was a portion of ration next to the body, as though mocking the victim.

‘What a broken person.’

He had felt that Ahram was twisted from the start, but being granted so much authority so quickly, this was inevitably going to happen. Who knows how many more would be sacrificed. It was now up to him to use this opportunity to clean things up.

‘I need to set up some sort of special experience for him and his guide.’

Sungchul closed her eyes that were frozen in fear, and quietly whispered under his breath.

“May you find happiness in the afterlife.”

He turned towards the dark forest, and the hidden danger from within stared back at him.

After sundown, the preselected would gather beyond the walls to eat their food while sitting on the forest floor. The rations they'd been provided by the Drill Sergeant only contained stale bread and a small bead that would turn into a mouthful of water when placed in your mouth. It wasn't tasty, but it was still something precious. They were the only ones among the 1500 that would be able to eat something in this week. Sungchul sat a distance away from the group, but he was still listening to their conversations.

“What did you do before?”

“College. I was still attending when I was suddenly dragged here.”

“Same here. I'm a college student as well.”

“Oh, is that right? What major?”

“I was a music major.”

That was the brand-name girl. People tended to talk more during their meals. Conversation acted to close the gaps in people's hearts and could bolster a person's spirits even in situations like these. All conversations stopped when a group of three drew near.

The preselected exchanged glances with each other. They were murderous glances from which a plan for senseless murder began formulating without a single word needing to be uttered.

“Wow, there really is food here!”

The man could only exclaim briefly before he fell silent, as though someone had suddenly sealed his mouth. Obnoxious chewing sounds could be heard.

Crunch. Smack. Chew.

The sound dissipated, and the uninvited guests licked their lips longingly before leaving.

“What was that.”

“I don’t know.”

The preselected became tense, they were filled with murderous intent but resumed their meal alongside their interrupted conversations. No one had noticed Sungchul’s involvement.

“...”

Sungchul kept a crimson slime wedged under a heavy rock and within his sight. Its name was ‘Blood Pudding’, it was usually a green herbivore that was about the size of an adult woman, but during its mating season, it would turn extremely aggressive and start devouring everything in sight. The problem though was that this species’ mating ritual had rarely been seen.

Sungchul lightly pushed away the rock holding the slime in place. Freed it from its binding, the slime leapt aggressively towards Sungchul.

Wham!

The Blood Pudding exploded with a single punch.

“Feeling brave are you, punk?”

Sungchul spoke icily towards the slimy crimson silhouettes deeper in the forest. Several hundred Blood Puddings resided within the forest, but the naked woman’s carcass had lured some of them into this pit. Sungchul kept them completely suppressed within this pit. Two more tried jumping out.

Wham! Wham!

The results were no different, a dozen tried by jumping simultaneously before their crimson slime splattered everywhere from the soundwaves. Dozens of blood puddings exploded. This was essentially a genocide, the blood puddings of the forest were at a risk of extinction.

Sungchul divided the blood puddings in half, and one-half of them ran past him. They instinctively felt fearful of him, Sungchul covered the corpse in the pit with dirt by using his feet and noted the direction the blood puddings were heading in.

“Hm? What is this?”

The preselected only discovered the blood puddings after the uninvited people had left. A few men who had grown bored after having their meals began approaching the blood puddings.

-D... danger... run...

As they approached the blood pudding, the Observer's Eye began transmitting the magician's warnings. However, it was too late, the stationary blood puddings suddenly jumped into the air and swallowed one of the men.

“Uwek! H-help!”

The man's clothing slowly started being digested by the blood pudding's digestive fluid.

“Hey! Let me go!”

The man next to him tried attacking the blood pudding with his blade, but it was to no avail. A slime's constitution made them impervious to physical attacks, which made it very difficult for newcomers to handle.

“Krrrrr!”

The man's face being dissolved within the digestive fluid, was

clearly visible from outside the slime's transparent body.

“UWAAAAA!”

The man abandoned the blade and fled the scene.

“What happened?”

The rest of the group finally realized that something must have happened, and quickly rose from their meal. However, by now the forest had already been filled with crimson slimes. The preselected finally felt fear within their hearts. Only Ahram still didn't fully understand the situation.

“What? What happened?”

They abandoned Ahram with his ignorant smile and scattered into the forest exit. Ahram figured something was up and started to get up. His eyes caught the man sitting with his back towards him. The man was wearing ragged jeans with military fatigues.

‘Ah, that smelly loner bitch.’

“Hey, Mister. What happ-?”

His vision suddenly turned yellow. When he awoke, he was surrounded by wildly growing grass and could feel the dirt on the ground.

‘W-what?’

He couldn’t remember what had happened. However, he did feel a sharp pain coming from his ankles.

“AAAAUGH! Shit! What the fuck!”

Something had broken his ankle. He barely managed to lift himself, when countless blood puddings came rushing in his direction.

“Ah... AH!!!”

The Blood Pudding’s slick body crawled up on Ahram’s sneakers.

Pssssh-

Ahram began foaming at the mouth and lost his consciousness at the sight of his sneakers being dissolved from the acid.

At that moment, a magic inscription appeared.

“Ice Bolt.”

From the seal, a lightly dressed woman appeared and swung her staff. Her hair was red, but her eyes were frosty.

“Damn it. For me to be stuck with such an annoying bastard.”

The young woman spat on to Ahram’s face and continued swinging her staff. The destructive blizzard of frost decimated the blood puddings.

“Haaa... What do I do with this son of a bitch? It’s not like I can kill him.”

The woman in question looked at Ahram with an annoyed expression and disappeared after shoving a healing potion down his throat. It was the epitome of a hit-and-run, but despite her best efforts, there was one person who had still witnessed everything from start to finish.

“....”

His name was none other than Kim Sungchul.

‘Dolorence Winterer. She must be at least a mid grade magician.’

The number of trained magicians were lacking, in turn, they also received better treatment. Mid-rank magicians would be able to even manage a whole division of a small guild. For this type of person to be stuck with this kid meant, Ahram must have some kind of importance to the backers. Sungchul digested the information, then nonchalantly picked up Ahram before heading back to the group.

—

Two days later, Ahram disappeared into the forest without anyone's knowledge, the Drill Sergeant was there waiting for him.

“I have been waiting. Great Human!”

The Drill Sergeant lead Ahram through the forest to a cliff using his usual tottering sort of steps. Below the cliff, there was a cave entrance. Ahram silently entered the forest, then popped out after an hour.

“Gasp gasp... Shit... it's still too hard.”

“Kekeke! Great human! There is no need to rush! There will definitely be progress if you challenge it again tomorrow!”

Sungchul carefully stepped out towards the cave after the pair had left.

“....”

He stepped in without a second thought. A series of brightly lit letters appeared before him.

[You have entered Vestiare's Dream World]

[Which dream of the Seven Heroes do you wish to view?]

[The difficulty varies with each dream.]

There were 6 different dreams listed ascending in difficulty.

[A Summer Day's Dream]

[False Dream of Spring]

[Dream of Troubled Sleep]

[Lucid Dreams]

[Memories of the Divine War]

[Eternal Nightmare]

“Seventh Hero, Vestiare.”

Seven heroes, they were the legendary figures once known for having saved the Other World. However, their names had arrogantly been listed at second among the five calamities. Sungchul's lips curled into a frosty smile. He chose one of the six dreams.

[You have dared to choose Seventh Hero Vestiare's Eternal Nightmare]

[Be prepared to be met with death within the eternal

darkness!]

Chapter 6 – Nightmare Of Vestiare (2)

This was the unfathomably distant past. There was a time when humans had been massively summoned into the Other World. The irresponsible gods left the fate of the Other World in the hands of the insignificant humans. The humans were immature and primitive, but they were able to overcome the Other World's tribulations after many sacrifices. There were seven heroes at the center of this. The Seven Heroes, as they had been called by the people, suddenly disappeared, with nothing but a legend stating that they would return when they were once again needed. This legend was fulfilled in the most ironic form possible.

[...The seven forgotten existences, who disappeared after trampling over the Devil's demonic forces, will one day return for the sake of their promise. Along with them, blood and death, war and pestilence will follow.]

The forgotten saviors of the past were now rewritten, as a calamity prophesying extinction within the minds of the people. However, no one could answer as to what kind of people these seven heroes actually were. It was one of the most heavily guarded secrets in this world, held only by the highest levels of authority. Sungchul was also counted amongst them.

‘Vestiare. She was definitely one of the mage heroes. A High Elf. She built a special penitentiary called Meari.’

His blood had started boiling as soon he had heard the name Vestiare. Vestiare had reached the peak of all mages. She must have created this cave in order to pass on her techniques and skills

to a worthy student.

‘It must have been from before they fell. Back when they still cared about humanity...’

Faith in humanity. The thought brought a bitter taste to his mouth, but it was almost over. He had already witnessed so much betrayal, change of heart, and corruption. He had seen enough evil to fill even the Devil with disgust. If it hadn’t been for his promise, he would have given up a long time ago. He might even have decided to give up all his strength and reincarnate back into the old world. It was the first and final promise he had made, back when he had still been an ordinary person.

“Whew...”

A sigh welling up from deep inside his chest spilled out. Sungchul’s eyes sharpened like the stars of the clear midnight sky, and he shook off the foggy memories of the past.

Another set of bright letters appeared before him.

[Be ready. The Eternal Nightmare is about to begin.]

His surroundings turned a bloody crimson, and the metallic stench of blood tickled his nose. Sungchul slowly moved forward. Within the blood mist, creatures that looked like a compressed

brain came into view. They were cloaked in invisibility magic, but it couldn't trick Sungchul's eyes. They were dream demons, commonly known as succubus or incubus. These demonic creatures would use the suction cups beneath their brain-like bodies to drain their victim's life force while injecting sweet dreams into their minds. It was similar to how mosquitoes also used anesthetics to drain blood.

A suction cup attached itself to Sungchul, but he continued, moving forward indifferently. The incubus began the sweet dreams through the suction cups into Sungchul's mind. Sungchul however, did not react to it at all.

One by one, other dream demons began attaching themselves to him. The massive swarm of dream demons formed something similar to a grotesque helmet sitting on his head. These dream demons continued to inject the most euphoric dreams imaginable into his mind. The average person would never have wished to wake up from such sweet dreams, but Sungchul suddenly stopped moving.

“Let's see... is that all of them?”

Sungchul's hand lightly brushed across his head. Five dream demons were gripped by their suction cups.

“....”

Sungchul wildly swung them over his head using their suction cups.

Slam!

“Kyaaaak!”

“Kiiiiii!”

They struck the walls of the cave and disappeared in a bloody mess. Sungchul brushed across his head again and grabbed some more.

“Kiii!”

The dream demons began emitting threatening noises, but these were meaningless acts of defiance. Sungchul’s gave them a full swing and a few more disappeared in a similar mess. The dream demons began detaching themselves from his head, finally feeling a sense of terror. Some of the dream demons doubled down with even more euphoric dreams, while others even tried injecting paralyzing nightmares. All resistance was meaningless.

Squeak!

Another batch of dream demons were pitifully killed after being mercilessly smashed into the wall. After several more repetition, all of the dream demons were decimated. Sungchul grabbed the last remaining dream demon and brought it to his eyes. His emotionless eyes stared at the glowing eyes of the succubus.

“Watch carefully, you bastards. I am your worst nightmare.”

Sungchul crushed the last dream demon in his hands.

“Kiiiiii!!!!”

The dream demon screamed in agony as it deformed all the while leaking brain fluid, before finally exploding.

Drip. Drip.

A mixture of blood and brain fluid was dripping from his hands. The reason he was able to overcome the dream demons was simple. Indomitable, the blessing that was able to overcome all forms of mental attack. The creatures who had died by his hands would not realize this truth even until the very end.

A ghostly doll lingered before Sungchul, who had handily cleaned up all of the dream demons. It emitted an unusual aura. He recognized it as a mana automaton.

‘A magician.’

The ghostly doll slowly approached Sungchul and revealed its form. Blond hair that was flowing like moonlight, its sparkling eyes like fallen stars, pointy ears, it was a high elf woman.

“You have killed all of my demonic underlings.”

The familiar woman spoke as though in a dream. Sungchul could surmise her identity from her appearance and her manner of speaking.

“You are Vestiare?”

The woman only faintly smiled. Sungchul realized then that he couldn't feel a presence from this woman.

‘This isn't Vestiare's physical body. It must just be some vestige of her memory.’

He might have called it a ‘vestige’, but it still contained a significant amount of magical power. Enough to make him feel some admiration towards Vestiare herself.

“I don't think you can finish the trial at this rate? Only those that can overcome 33 euphoric dreams and 27 painful nightmares would be able to obtain the prepared rewards. And now you have removed all of the tools.”

“Didn't I win then? I've ‘overcome’ all those things that would inject the dreams.”

Vestiare's remnant laughed at Sungchul's words.

“You are interesting.”

“I suppose you have some level of consciousness, despite being just a remnant. Seeing as you have some ability to decide.”

“Ah, you have noticed my identity?”

Sungchul feigned ignorance at Vestiare’s question by raising his shoulders. In one of his open hands, an oversized hammer appeared. Fal Garaz, the hammer rumored to have been forged within the skies by the Dwarven gods. The divine weapon that filled the arrogant devils of the demon world with terror had revealed its form inside this cave.

“Would I get a reward for removing you?”

Vestiare’s remnant looked shocked but then smiled approvingly at Sungchul’s blunt demand.

“If you can.”

As soon as the words left her lips, Sungchul instantly tore across the floor towards Vestiare’s remnant. The remnant once again looked shocked, but still managed to cast a magical trap and blink away.

BLAAAAM!

Sungchul’s body, snared by the magical trap, was enveloped in

blue flames and had his movement dulled. Vestiare's remnant concentrated on continuing to blink away just enough to keep a distance from him. A massive blue flame began to roar above her head as it took the shape of a spear. When Sungchul tried to leap forward once again, several traps all triggered at once.

BOOOM!

The blue flame exploded. Sungchul had tripped the triggers. The result was the same, but the reason was different. He was intentionally triggering the traps with the tip of his toe as he ran by them.

BOOOM!

Dozens of traps began chaotically triggering at the same time. Vestiare's remnant flew into the air with the explosions concealing her target. A large shadow loomed across her face through the geysers of blue flames and her flaming spear that she had conjured.

WHAM!

One-hit K.O.

Vestiare's remnant was splayed upon the floor, and the flaming spear it had conjured above its head unraveled.

"... Stop exaggerating. I didn't hurt you that badly."

Sungchul stood before her without a scratch. The remnant's lashes trembled slightly.

“You are strong. Very strong.”

Sungchul simply glared at the remnant icily and asked.

“Where are the seven heroes?”

An update on the Seven Heroes. This was the sole reason he had kept the remnant alive. Vestiare's remnant briefly closed its eyes and spoke with a soft voice that was filled with respect.

“We will appear before you when the time is right. When the prophecy of destruction approaches. Even without anyone seeking us.”

“I see.”

Fal Garaz rose into the sky. Its shadow drew onto the remnant's face. The remnant was laughing.

“You are the same as us.”

“I am?”

Sungchul’s hammer shook slightly.

“I could feel it through the dream demons. You have the same... no, maybe much more disappointment and rage that is suppressed inside you.”

“I won’t become like you. Seven Heroes.”

“Will that be so? If the misplaced promise that sustains you ever goes awry... “

“Shut up.”

The hammer abruptly fell. Vestiare’s remnant shattered like glass and scattered across the floor. The blood fog weakened, and the blood-dyed the surroundings, which eventually returned to its original colors. Sungchul quietly waited in silence, for his deserved reward.

[You have destroyed Vestiare’s Dream.]

[You have achieved the mission ‘Destroyer of Dreams (Hidden – Epic)’]

Reward – 30x Palace Token

+10 Magic Power Intuition Magic Resistance

The Magical Staff ‘Moonlight’ (Rare)

“ ”

Disappointment passed across his eyes. The rewards were pitifully lacking. ‘Missions’ were rated higher than quests. They were interchangeable with quests, but they were one-offs and unique to each mission. They were also much more difficult compared to quests, usually the rewards were also comparably great. This time, however, proved to be the exception.

‘Did they compensate for the fact that this was inside the Summoning Palace? I suppose Vestiare’s remnant could only be compared to a mid-rank magician. This staff also would be invaluable to a newbie.’

The rewards also held a unique value to Sungchul. He was able to obtain 10 intuition, which was invaluable to him. Sungchul quickly opened his status window.

[Stats]

Strength 999+

Dexterity 853

Vitality 801

Magic Power 13

Intuition 1

Magic Resist 621

Resilience 501

Charisma 18

Intuition finally escaped the negative values. This meant that he would be able to accomplish his magician class by simply completing the common quests obtained from the homunculus. He also had more than enough Palace Tokens needed for the class change.

‘Should I slowly put an end to this act...’

He accomplished his goal. He just had to take it easy for the rest of the trials in the Palace. He started to turn back with these carefree thoughts when more words appeared.

[Seventh Hero acknowledges your existence.]

[Seventh Hero has placed you in her sights.]

“I didn’t really need this...”

Sungchul felt annoyed, but words kept appearing.

[Seventh Hero Vestiare is overjoyed by your achievements in the mission.]

[Seventh Hero Vestiare granted you an additional reward for overcoming the mission.]

Reward: Echo Mage’s Scroll

“Echo Mage...?!”

Sungchul recognized the class. Echo Mage. This was the Seventh Hero Lightning Echo Vestiare’s unique class. Regular mages could only cast magic once with each cast, but echo mage could copy unique echoes of each spell to repeatedly cast out their spell. This ability had allowed Vestiare to raise the firepower of a simple fireball to hellfire grade strength. This legendary ability was now within his grasp.

“....”

Sungchul silently touched the Echo Mage’s Scroll, and its information revealed itself.

[Echo Mage’s Scroll]

Grade: Legendary

Type: Class Transfer (Compact Form)

Effect: Legendary Class Echo Mage Acquisition

Note: On the final day of the Summoning Palace, open the scroll. Vestiare’s vision will reveal itself to you.

Restrction: 20 Magic Power 20 Intuition 20+ Magic Resist

Required: x50 Palace Token

“Shit.”

It was still too early for him to take it easy.

Chapter 7 – Krill Regall (1)

“Shit! Shit...!”

Krill Regall was being faced with the greatest disaster of his life. He had skirted life and death several times after he was first summoned into the Other World, but that was nothing compared to his current predicament.

“The week is ending soon, all the magicians will be made to report on the physical conditions of their blood charges before the next sunrise.”

The muscular Grand Knight from the Order of the Iron Blood Knights made this announcement in a gravelly voice. Iron Blood Knights were one of the three greatest guilds from the northern region of the main continent. They were known for their immovable strength, as well as being capable of holding their own against the mightiest of the demon tribe’s main forces.

It had just been a year since he had been summoned. Krill couldn’t afford to offend such a powerful guild. He had lost contact with the newly summoned Preselect whom the Iron Blood Knights had put him in charge of. Death was a common occurrence within the Summoning Palace. A failure of this magnitude would almost guarantee his execution. Just how had this happened?

Krill anxiously began to recollect the day he had lost contact with his chosen. Jang Hyunsuk had asked for his name, it was a unique event when the preselect asked for your name. Krill didn’t think

much of it and had replied properly, there hadn't been any risk in doing so.

Being chosen within the Summoning Palace, meant they would have a faster growth and also witness valuable secrets of the large guilds. It was an investment towards goodwill with an upcoming bigshot. The problem was that his blood charge had then asked for his name again.

He didn't have a deep connection with his charge, and he couldn't really check his connection. He could only suspect that something had happened during the first and second question.

'The Observer's Eye had lost vision for a while. Could it be that the Eye had been targeted during that time?'

Observer's Eye was an extremely convenient tool, but its combat capabilities were pitifully lacking. It wouldn't survive an assault against even the average stray cat. This was why they were veiled by an invisibility spell, but it wasn't uncommon for a stray rock or bird to bump into them. Krill placed all of his hopes on this being the case. He had to hope that the Eye was just down and that Hyunsuk was still alive within the group. The simplest way to confirm this was with another magician. They could ask their own chosen charges and easily confirm his suspicions.

However, these grounds weren't so amiable. There were 48 magicians residing within the Northern Observatory of the Blanche Plaza, only 25 of who were in charge of the 'elite' charges, none of these people were on good terms with Krill.

Babysitting these kids was the highest position among the low-rank magicians. This meant that the competition was fierce enough that no one would be willing to share anything. They would be happier eliminating their competition than to help him in any way.

It might have been a bleak hope, but there was one person that might be willing to help him.

“What? You want to borrow my Observer’s Eye?”

Dolorence Winterer. She was the Observer’s only mid-rank mage. She was a senior from the same Magic School and a member of the same guild. Normally, he would never dare talk to her, but now she was his only hope.

“Yes... I’m begging you!”

Krill poured out all of his sincerity and bowed at the waist. Both his eyes were clenched shut in desperation as he waited for her reply. All he could hear was laughter. Not good, It was enough to completely shatter all hopes he had of salvaging the situation.

“You want me to take care of some person that can’t even manage watching over his Observer’s Eye? That’s a disgrace. Get out of my sight. It feels stupid in here.”

“I-I’m sorry!”

“I won’t report you to the higher ups. You’ll at least have a day before you get caught.”

After looking at him with disgust clear in her eyes, Dolorence left the observatory in proud strides. He could hear a chilling word from down the hall.

“Fucking idiot.”

“....”

His body trembled, and cold sweat trickled down in beads. Humiliation and anger suppressed all the air in his lungs.

“....Shit! Damn bitch!”

He wanted to tear her apart, but he lacked the strength, he didn’t even have the power to fix his own pitiful fate. He couldn’t do anything but fall to the floor and cry silently. He cried there until a middle-aged magician found him.

“Hm?”

Their eyes met. Krill didn’t know his name, but he knew of the man’s identity. A slave hunter. They were tasked with poaching any talented recruits among the newly summoned batches. Krill couldn’t be proud of his own position, but it was still several times

better than a slave hunter's. It was a heartless job meant for heartless people. Now, a slave hunter was looking at Krill with great interest.

“Why is such a young man crying so pitifully? Did you miss your meal?”

Krill would never associate with such a character. He might be older but these fallen magicians had already had their names removed from the Magician Guild's ledger. There was no reason to treat them as fellow magicians.

However, everything could change according to the circumstance.

“Did you lose your pet rabbit?”

The middle-aged magician smiled widely and took a step towards Krill.

“I do not wish to talk to you, sir.”

The middle-aged magician feigned surprise, but kept smiling mockingly.

“Looking at you, you've definitely lost your pet rabbit.”

“...”

Krill didn't bother hiding his irritation and stood up to walk away. The man's final words clung onto Krill's back.

"Such a shame. I might not be completely out of ideas on how to help..."

It was enough bait to successfully hook Krill. He reluctantly turned around and approached the man. His eyes still bloodshot from his crying.

"You remind me a lot of myself."

The man stretched out his left arm as he spoke. His arm began revealing itself from the long sleeve of the robe. Amputee. His left arm had been completely removed down from the elbow.

"Thankfully, Typhoon is a generous guild and left it out with just an arm. If it was anyone else, I might have lost my tongue or my neck."

He spoke lightly, but his tone was vindictive. Krill shook slightly.

"So... you too...?"

"Yep. I was also a candidate sitter. No luck though. Who knew he'd get stabbed by an ally before the Rank Up match?"

The slave hunter's confession adequately softened Krill's guarded heart. As his natural guard fell, Krill voluntarily clung to the slave hunter as he really didn't have anywhere else to turn.

"Before... I apologize, but... please help me. I-I'm running out of time!"

The slave hunter closed his eyes, as if sympathizing with Krill, then tossed him a single key.

"You know about the tunnel for the slaves on the lower floor, right? There will be things that are unsettling, just shut your eyes and keep on going. It'll lead you to the summoning plaza."

"... You mean go out personally?"

"That'll be the most surefire way. No one's letting you borrow one anyways, right? An Observer's Eye."

The middle-aged mage's words were simply this: there were no other options. Krill held onto the key in thought, but eventually hurried away with a quick nod.

'It can't be helped. Since it has come to this point, I might as well check on Hyunsuk's condition personally.'

Everything would return to normal if Hyunsuk was alive. It would take a considerable sum to summon another Observer's Eye that is enchanted with invisibility, but what did money matter at

this point?

Krill made his way to the slave entrance at an impatient pace.

“Ugh...”

It was an awful stench. The combined stench of human feces, rotting flesh, and sewage was enough to make one dizzy. He could see the slaves chained to the sides of the tunnel, and the brutal slave hunters breaking the slaves' wills by using a special incense. All of this was accompanied by pitiful screams echoing throughout the length of the tunnel. He could hear the sizzling sound of burning flesh.

“Kukuku! Look at the bastard's strugglin'. He'll be a good product.”

The sharp eyes glowing from the burning embers turned to focus on the uninvited guest.

“Kukuku.... A little chick magician came here for some playtime? You can already see the slaves here, so take a pick.”

“....”

Krill grit his teeth and picked up his pace. It chilled his heart hearing another pitiful scream intermingled with the sound of burning flesh.

‘Fucking trash.’

He saw a pile of corpses further down. He could see a pair of red eyes flash within the pile.

“Kekek... Human! Do you have any candy?”

“If you have any candy, please hand it over!”

It was a group of homunculi. However, these homunculi were much more disfigured than the average. They all wore ripped clothes and a broken face, some even lacking a limb or two. These were the outcasts.

“There human! Why are you ignoring me!”

A homunculus missing an eye and a leg grabbed onto Krill’s pants after crawling to him with his arms.

“Hand over candy, please!”

Krill’s face crumpled. He simply crushed the homunculus’ head with his heel.

“Tchyaaaaa!”

He was classified as a magician trainee, but he was still someone that had survived all of the Summoning Palace’s trials. Someone like a homunculus was no match for him anymore.

“Shoo! Filthy things!”

The Homunculi scattered like roaches into the corpses.

Krill finally managed to find the rusty gate after crossing through the tunnel of corpses. he stared at the key in his hand, and grit his teeth as he looked at the gate.

‘I’ll definitely find you. For sure.’

—

The cave no longer emitted any magic after the trials ended. Sungchul stored Fal Garaz and the Echo Mage’s Scroll into his soul storage and looked over his other rewards. 30 Palace Tokens and the magic staff ‘Moonlight’. Palace Tokens could be hidden inside his pocket, but the staff was much more conspicuous. He continued to stare at ‘Moonlight’ until its stats displayed themselves.

[Moonlight]

Grade: Rare – Low Grade

Type: Magic Staff (Rechargeable)

Effect: Fires an energy bolt after activation

Charge: 100%

Note: A staff crafted from the bark of a cypress tree bathed in moonlight. It is packed with magical power, but the staff itself is quite fragile! Use with caution!

Its capabilities wasn't anything worthwhile, and physically it was just a wooden stick. He would normally have tossed it without a second thought, but it was significant to earn items before the first rank match.

‘What should I do. Should I keep it or just store it?’

He contemplated for quite a while, but decided to just hold onto it for now. Moonlight was a rather high caliber weapon for this stage of the trials, and also, it would allow an alternate method for him to progress without having to rely solely on his actual strength. It was not like anyone would question him, but it also wouldn't be too hard to make up a lie about how he had gotten this weapon.

Sungchul grabbed Moonlight and walked away from the cave.

‘Anyhow, I ended up needing 9 more intuition. The Palace Token amounts is barely enough too. Palace Tokens have to be earned by standing out... but that's not something I want to do.’

He had wanted to leave the group of the preselected when he had

earned the 10 intuition. Now, if he wanted to become an Echo Magician, he would need to meet the additional requirements by tracking down some more hidden quests.

‘Can’t be helped. I’ll just have to fit in for a little bit longer.’

Ahram’s fate continued to change without his knowing.

As Sungchul stepped back inside, a loud noise, followed by a shout, reverberated within the plaza.

Chapter 8 – Krill Regall (2)

The homunculi were at the center of the chaos.

“Now! Now! This is a special ration provided for the rank match tomorrow! Humans! Eat plenty and bring out your strength!”

The homunculi were distributing hard bread with mysterious meat inside, from a large cart pulled by eight goats. The starving people flew into a frenzy at the first sight of food after several days. 1500 people swarmed the cart like bees and began fighting for any reason whatsoever. In the worst cases, they would start to fight with their weapons and even killed over the food.

Sungchul ignored the chaos and focused on what the Homunculus had said.

‘Rank matches are tomorrow? Did it get pulled forward?’

Rank matches were the most important events in the Summoning Palace. There were four plazas: Blanche, Azure, Crimson, and Scarlet. Within the Summoning Palace, they would hold a death match with special conditions between each plaza. These matches were the rank matches.

In Sungchul’s time, these rank matches would kill off at least a hundred people each time. Sometimes it would cut down a group by half its number. These rank matches also provided plentiful rewards for the survivors. The Summoning Palace’s objective was to raise functional people to integrate with the Other World by

using these hellish conditions.

It felt like that objective had changed now. The privileged chosen, the 'Preselected', were an indisputable proof of this.

“Now. Watch that. Isn't it fucking funny? They are crawling like dogs just to eat some rotten bread.”

“What else are they going to do? They haven't eaten anything else.”

While the average summoned were fighting for food with their lives, the preselected were busy mocking them while sitting underneath the shade of the training center. Some silently continued training, but others were embracing their first form of entertainment in a while. Sungchul quietly claimed a corner of the center and fell deep into meditation. One of the common quests required him to meditate at a set time for 2 Intuition.

When the meditation ended, he circled the plaza looking for inscriptions that were hidden along the walls to read aloud. It wasn't well known, but the Summoning Palace's inscriptions changed daily. Even the former 'Death shall set you free', was now, 'Life might be painful, but there might also be value'.

He had continuously worked on common quests so he could gain intuition, but now, he also needed magic power. The targeted hidden class, Echo Mage, required intuition and magic power of 20 to obtain it.

Sungchul scoured through the list obtained from the homunculus and memorized each relevant quest. Especially the long-term quests, or the repetitive quests which needed to be completed first. Sungchul efficiently utilized each moment of his day so he could continuously progress through these quests.

He didn't slack off on observing the others in his group, especially Ahram. He might be fortunate again and discover an opportunity like with Vestiare's cave.

As Vestiare's Memorial had been completed, Ahram's guiding mage ought to be busy preparing a new growth opportunity for him. They couldn't guarantee his survival in the trials otherwise. No matter how superior the people in this group were, this place was like the jungle; there would be plenty of geniuses among the crowd who were lying in wait. Careless people were constantly losing their lives around these parts. Sungchul got up as he noticed the sunset.

"Let's slowly begin our meals."

Yuhoon, who had been sweating by the spinning blade dummy, finally called the group together. The few who had grown tired of the endless fights followed along without a fuss. Sungchul woke from his meditation and followed after them.

As he was brushing off the dirt, a man approached him.

"Um... Mister."

It was the yankee punk that had criticized Yuhoon during the first day. He was being ostracized by the group along with Sungchul. He didn't outright refuse socializing with them as Sungchul did, but his outward appearance and brash attitude had formed a barrier between them. He felt particularly competitive towards Yuhoon but didn't have any particular talents or skill to speak of, so it came off as desperate in Sungchul's view.

“You wanna eat together?”

He forced the words out with much difficulty. He had a tough exterior, but he was still human and must have started feeling lonely after a while. Sungchul returned a smile.

“Let's do that then.”

After the blood pudding incident, Yuhoon had moved the usual eating spot from the forest to underneath the walls. It was more likely to be discovered by the others, but it was less dangerous. As usual, Sungchul sat slightly apart from the group and chewed on his hard bread. The only difference now was that another person was sitting beside him.

Yungjong had been preparing for a government position in the real world. He'd lived a short life of 25, but with an empty smile, he spoke bitterly about how nothing had worked out as he'd planned.

“The competition was so fierce. It wasn't so easy to overcome half of the youth population in Korea, you know?”

“Is that so?”

It had been a while since he heard any recent stories from the real world. He only managed to maintain his original appearance through several facial reconstructions and surgeries, but the time which had passed in this world hasn't been short.

“That's so strange. I didn't think the government work test would be that popular?”

“What crazy reality are you from?”

It had been 20 years since he had been summoned to the Other World. That was enough time to carve a river into a mountain. He recalled the times he used his bus tokens to get a ride to the roller disco so he could skate along with the disco music.

‘I wonder if those who have reincarnated back are doing well.’

There were some of the summoned that managed to amass great achievements which allowed them a path to return back to reality, they were called the reincarnators. A few among Sungchul's old companions had chosen to return back to reality at the cost of the majority of their strength. Sungchul had also felt compelled to return, but he had cleanly given up by now. It was enough for him to listen to current events through word of mouth.

Snapping away from his thoughts, he noticed Ahram chewing on

bread away from the group; it didn't seem to have any special meaning. As he was about to turn back his gaze, he noticed a new being he had never noticed before. One man was standing at a distance. He was dressed in a conspicuous outfit, looking over in this direction. It was unlike the modern clothes of the other summoned, but rather like the magician's robe of this world.

‘A magician? It's interesting to see another human other than a summoned in the Summoning Palace.’

Sungchul's eyes sparkled with curiosity.

—

“Not here... Not here. Hyunsuk that piece of shit...”

The magician in the distance was none other than Krill Regall. He had taken the slave tunnel to the plaza exterior and took quite some time to find the preselected's group. He only knew one face from the group, but he couldn't find him. Hyunsuk, the Asian kid with a punchable face.

‘Did he really die?’

He felt terror crawl up his spine as he counted the people in the group. There were 23 people sitting in the circle eating, two less than the amount chosen originally. It was possible that he was within the plaza, but it was more likely that he was dead.

‘Shit. How did this happen? What happened?’

He suddenly noticed one detail. Among the 23 preselected, there was one person without an Observer’s Eye. He had a slim build with an average height. A man wearing military fatigues and old jeans. He confirmed again with his Glasses of Truth, but the man truly didn’t have the Observer’s Eye around him.

‘Could it be...? This guy pulled some kind of trick?’

Krill’s eyes emitted a cold murderous intent. He carefully walked towards the group. It was then that the man in military fatigues began heading towards the forest on his own.

A chance.

Krill felt a twinge of excitement at the tip of his tongue as he followed the man into the forest.

‘I don’t know what your plans are, but I’m planning on making you sing.’

He had a squeamish personality and didn’t enjoy doing anything violent, but there was no time for him to be picky. He had to get through this disaster at any cost. He kept reassuring himself with these words as he pulled out a magic staff and followed after the man.

“Looking for me?”

An unexpected voice, came from an unexpected direction.

‘What is this guy?’

He was grabbed from behind. However, this was only a newly summoned. He should be able to handle him even without using any of his magic, through the physical strength he had honed from the Summoning Palace’s many quests. He tried to counter the assault while keeping this in mind.

Wham!

His vision turned yellow in one blow.

“Uwak!”

When he came to, the man was stepping on Krill’s chest firmly with his foot. He tried to move, but it felt like he was nailed to the ground. He finally realized the man in the military fatigues was no normal person.

“Hey, Magician. Why are you looking for me?”

The man, Sungchul, spoke in a frosty tone.

“T-that is...”

“Are you looking for your blood charge?”

Krill was ambushed verbally and his weak spot was immediately exposed.

“How is that kid?”

Krill asked desperately. It was all but a crushed dream, but he still pulled, even on his final thread of hope. Sungchul’s reply, however, couldn’t be more blunt.

“He died.”

“Uuu...”

Krill’s shoulders finally lost all strength. The word ‘despair’ flooded his mind. All hope disappeared, and the image of the slave hunter who had helped him appeared in his head. What he had thought was crude and disgusting at first was now a vision of his future. It was at this moment that another glimmer of hope appeared.

“Looking for a hole to live in?”

It was Sungchul. He removed his foot from his chest and spoke quietly.

“Help me, and I’ll give you a way out of this.”

Kek...

Something shiny fell on Krill’s head. It was a blue emerald.

Chapter 9 – Krill Regall (3)

Money made anything possible.

This remained true for both the real world and this one. Two of the preselected belonging to the Iron Blood Knight Order were dead, but only one death had been reported. The other magician who had lost his preselected was dragged off by the Iron Blood Knights and was never seen again. In Krill's short lifetime, there has never been a moment that has caused him to shudder more. Krill was now standing at attention in the office and in front of the high ranked and armored Iron Blood Knight.

“You are wise, my friend. You said you were Krill Regall?”

The high ranking Iron Blood Knight brought up the thick emerald to his eyes and carefully examined it through one eye. He has had many accomplishments, as the scars on his face gave witness. This man was the 3rd Assault Regiment's Captain, Sangil Ma. In this mass summoning, he was the one in charge of nurturing the preselected.

“If you tried to bribe me with pocket change, you would have gotten some harsh treatment. You might have suffered a worse fate than the other idiot who got dragged away earlier. In a place you don't know very well called Korea, there is a serious crime called overstepping your boundaries.”

Sangil said this with a bone-chilling smile.

“When... When have I ever done such a thing?”

He placed the emerald deep into his pocket and spoke in a low voice.

“I know that. That’s why I’ve called you over.”

“For now, return to the observation tower.”

“What? You said... return?”

His preselected was dead. What was there to be done even if he returned?

Sangil trimmed his fingernails with a nail clipper as he spoke with an annoyed voice.

“I thought you had a good head on your shoulders, but maybe I was mistaken.”

“...”

“Hyunsuk is alive.”

When he heard this, Krill sensed a chill running all over his body.

‘It’s exactly like that guy had said!’

The man, who hadn't revealed his name, told Krill with a cold voice.

“They will at least leave you alive for the moment. But remember, they will never let you go, nor will they forgive you.”

The current situation was flowing exactly as the unknown man had predicted. Sangil sent Krill back to the observation tower to wait on standby. In the bird cage, there was a small flying squirrel with white striped fur moving about busily. Krill tied a letter the size of a sesame seed to the leg of the flying squirrel then whispered as he opened the back window.

“Please deliver this to that person.”

“Kyu kyu!”

The unusually intelligent flying squirrel nodded and then let his small body fly out through the open window.

*

“Kyu, kyu!”

Kim Sungchul untied the paper on the squirrel's leg and confirmed the contents within.

[Tomorrow's Ranked matches will go by Alamo Rule. You will go up against zombies.]

[The rewards cutoffs are at 1/3/10/30 zombies]

[The bonus monsters will be wearing red hats.]

“.....”

Sungchul memorized the contents in his head and rubbed the paper between his fingers. The paper became dust and scattered in the wind.

“You did well.”

Kim Sungchul took out a piece of bread from his pocket and offered it to the flying squirrel.

“Kyuing?”

The flying squirrel enjoyed the bread, then stared at Sungchul with some interest before disappearing into the darkness.

He's a smart cookie, Sungchul thought as he recounted the information Krill Regall had provided him.

“Zombies will be coming out with Alamo Rules. That's not a bad start.”

Rank matches had many methods. There could be death matches amongst the summoned of each plaza or fights arranged between elites representing each plaza, or even Pac-Man game where you have to avoid the monsters, and many other odd rules with names that had no clear origin, like his own.

The Alamo Rule, which would begin soon, was one in which the summoned would work together to defend against numerous demonic creatures. Although the demonic creatures were easy enough for newbies to overcome individually, there would be a great number of them. As the defenders, it would feel like they were fighting against endless waves of monsters.

However, this was also an opportunity. Even though these were weak monsters, as long as you could take care of them you would be rewarded. Krill Regall had mentioned cutoffs for the rewards, which changed at each marking of 1, 3, 10, and 30 kills.

In other words, it meant the finest rewards could be had from hunting over 30 of them. Of course, if you were to be in the top 3 in kill score you would also get a special reward; but he had no intention of being in the top 3. He would do just enough work to get all of the standard rewards. That was Sungchul's goal, he would be on the lookout for the so-called bonus monsters.

The zombies with the red hats, these bonus monsters, were slightly stronger than the normal ones; but defeating them yielded great rewards.

Sungchul wasn't certain about exactly what the rewards would be, but based on his past experience, it definitely included Palace Tokens. This information was valuable to Sungchul who was in dire need of 19 additional Palace Tokens.

On the dawn of the second day. Sungchul opened his eyes to a familiar demonic energy.

The necromancers had arrived at the summoning palace and were chanting an incantation to raise the dead.

“Guuuuuuh”

In the morgue below the summoning palace, the dead were coming to life. These were the victims from the first day of the mass summoning. Thousands of these corpses followed the necromancer's orders to move through the underground tunnels to stand just outside Blanche Plaza's entrance which was connected to the palace. Most of the summoned couldn't imagine such a scene, but the Preselected were told ahead of time of what was happening

“Kim hyung! Did you hear that voice?”

Yungjong acted rather friendly.

“You mean the part where ranked matches will start today?”

“Yup. According to their guides, they were told to fight at the

front instead of heading towards the backlines.”

“Is that so?”

“They said to get at least 30. God damn it... I’m a bit nervous.”

Getting 30 kills was the minimum requirement to get the best rewards. Krill Regall’s information seems reliable. A little after sunrise, the homunculi, including the Drill Sergeant, appeared at the Blanche Plaza.

“Now now, humans! Rise and shine! The most important event; the ranked matches, starts now!”

The people who were hungry and thirsty all stared at the homunculi with vacant eyes. The Drill Sergeant showed off his razor teeth as he smiled and started speaking in his particularly annoying voice.

“All of your friends who had come with you will be here soon! It’s simple! Just play with your old friends for 1 hour! But remember! If you kill your friends, you can get water and rations. The rewards will grow with the more you kill!”

After the homunculi disappeared, a low trumpet sound was heard over the palace walls. The gargantuan walls that were always closed were now being opened wide. Each member of the crowd had a blade in hand and was staring nervously at what lay beyond while the doors slowly opened. Outside the palace doors were

several humans. Humans that were staggering and walking strangely. While the crowd was bustling, Sungchul read the message that appeared in front of his eyes.

[First round of the Ranked matches now begins.]

[Rule: Alamo]

[Featured Monster: Zombies]

[Raise your sword and fight. Cut down your enemies. Here, your value will be measured only in what you prove through your own actions.]

“A sword.”

Sungchul smirked as he grasped the staff in his hand. Moonlight, one of Vestiare’s gifts. Today, Kim Sungchul thought of using Moonlight instead of a sword for the audience at the observation tower.

The ruling class of Other World gathered in the observation towers on Ranked Match days and would gamble great sums of money on which plaza would win. Among those in the plazas, there are some who are able to wield a sword well in their own right, as well as those who are naturals in fighting.

Using Moonlight would help him stand out, but the bastards up in the tower would lose interest quickly; What they wanted to see was not some wimp who relied on items but diamonds in the rough who showed a genuine talent for fighting. The strong, hidden

among the crowd, will awaken to their true nature on the battlefield today and will henceforth work themselves to exhaustion during the trials to grow even stronger.

“Kim hyung, let’s try our best.”

The preselected were all at the frontlines, as if by a previous arrangement. Sungchul found Ahram among them. He was also at the frontlines. But he was not holding onto a sword; he held a staff. It looked a little different from Sungchul’s, but it also looked like a mage staff charged with magic power.

‘Since he didn’t train properly, did they have to babysit him with that staff?’

Sungchul had destroyed Vestiare’s fragment, so the magician in charge of Ahram didn’t really have much of a choice. Even though it was conspicuous, in order to raise Ahram’s capability immediately, he had to be given an item that could be used instantly to boost his power. To Sungchul this was good news; It meant that he did not need to be careful about holding back with Moonlight.

[Ranked match begins now.]

[Restrictions have been removed.]

[Warning! You could die!]

As the message disappeared, the zombies outside the palace door pushed forward into the plaza with a singular purpose.

“Uwooooooh!”

The summoned chose to step back frightened by the sight of the zombies pouring in.

“Uuuh..! Please let me live!”

“What the fuck is this bullshit...”

There were some who edged back from the fight.

“Alright, everyone! Let’s go!”

Some of the summoned who had the will to fight got into a formation and faced off against the zombies. Sungchul noticed that the man who was leading them was the middle-aged office worker from the first day, who had recruited a party despite being told off numerous times. The man lacked strength but fought on desperately and engaged with a hit-and-run battle tactic.

Unlike that man, there were those who stood their ground and fought. It was uncertain if they were also one of the preselected, but they had courage on par with a preselected and good instincts for battle. They were the type that got the feel of it with each zombie kill and quickly grew stronger. These are probably the types that the ones at the observation tower watched with the

most interest. Of course, the preselected behind them were not just idling either.

“Now! Everyone, let’s go!”

The Preselected including Yohoon went into the fray as well.

Slash!

Zombies were cut down easily. This was inevitable; the zombies’ power were on par with the average summoned’s power on their first day in the world. In the past week, the preselected had been bestowed blessings, given enchanted weapons, and gone on training; To them, the zombies were nothing more than smelly lumps of meat.

“Wo... Woah! I got one of these!”

Among the preselected, Yungjong was rather cowardly, but even he was able to easily cut down a zombie. Some of the women stubbornly refused to go out and fight, but the preselected were already doing their part. Meanwhile, Park Ahram was standing with the women in the rear until he decided it was time. From his staff, two spirit wolves emerged and leapt at the zombies, whipping up a bloody storm.

“Excellent! You’re doing great!”

Ahram’s raucous laughter reverberated over the battlefield.

“.....”

Sungchul avoided the battle until there was a lull before using his staff. He aimed his staff at a zombie and poured strength into it. Energy bolts shot out of the end of the staff and pierced through the bodies of the zombies.

“Woah! Kim hyung! What was that?”

Youngjong asked in surprise.

Kim Sungchul replied nonchalantly.

“This? I picked it up in the forest.”

As he said this, Sungchul made a quick work of the zombies. Ten, Twenty, Twenty-nine. With one more left, Sungchul scanned the masses of zombies rushing in. Finally, he found the bastard he was searching for; the zombie wearing a red hat. Sungchul headed towards the bonus monster. However, two spirit wolves passed by him and rushed at the red hat zombie first.

He could hear a giddy laughter coming from behind him.

“Ahahahaha! That one’s mine! Nobody shall touch it!”

It was Ahram. Anger erupted from Sungchul’s eyes.

‘That son of a bitch is asking for a beating..’

Sungchul held himself back in the hopes that the kid would still have some uses in the future. He grabbed the head of a zombie off the floor and threw it backwards. The zombie head flew like an arrow straight towards Ahram.

“Ack!”

Ahram cried out and crumpled on the floor. He dropped his precious staff before he fell unconscious.

As soon as he let go of the staff, his connection to the spirit wolves was severed. Sungchul now had the opportunity to take the red hat zombie for himself. As he was aiming his staff, he noticed a woman who ran like a cheetah towards the red hat zombie.

On the outside, she looked like an ordinary summoned. However, the vigor and skill with which she ran... the energy in her focused gaze was unusual; If he wasn't careful, he could lose the red hat to her.

“ ... ”

Sungchul poured his herculean strength through his body and in a flash, he was standing between the mysterious woman and the red hat zombie

Stab!

Sungchul’s sword pierced through the heart of the zombie and their gazes met. Her eyes were filled with astonishment, but her unwavering gaze was abnormal even by his battle-hardened standards. However, the message which popped up concealed her from his eyes.

[You have eliminated the bonus monster!]

Rewards:

- 1. Palace Token x 3
- 2. Light Shield of Vitality (Common)

Chapter 10 – Alchemist (1)

The first Rank Match drew to a close. There were countless zombies and human corpses strewn about on the floor. This had been relatively easy compared to some other trials, but there were still more than a few casualties. Their numbers had been cut down to below a thousand. Most of the injured came from the latter half of the fight when the zombies managed to push through the group with their sheer numbers and decimated everyone.

However, the overall strength of the summoned had also grown. Those that had contributed in killing the zombies were granted bonus stats and rewards.

[The first Rank Match has ended.]

[Blanche Plaza has slaughtered 852 creatures.]

[4th Place of the 4 Colored Plazas.]

[Overall rewards will be according to ranking.]

[The Administration of the Summoning Palace will judge the rewards.]

An unexpected turn of events had occurred. No, it would be more accurate to say that he had a brief lapse of memory. Even 25 years ago, the rewards had still been handed out based on merit. He reflected on the reason he could have forgotten such a crucial detail and came up with an answer.

‘Blanche Plaza was always number one. We never let go of that

position even once. It was unimaginable to think that the other Plazas could beat ours. That must be why I had instinctively chosen this plaza.'

25 years ago, many famous figures appeared from the Blanche Plaza: the one with great charisma who had held the people together, the smart one who had cleverly formulated how to overcome each trial, and then the silent one who resolutely held the front; Sungchul was of the third category.

He had always stood at the frontlines to protect the others, and grew stronger unintentionally. Faded faces flashed through his mind. Some were still alive, others were dead. The survivors had become giants; each of whom by now had a great deal of influence in their own area.

“....”

His reverie was interrupted by a new message.

[The Division of Rewards for each plaza is complete.]

[Congratulations! You have acquired first-grade rewards!]

[You have been rated Reward Grade A.]

Basic Rewards:

2x Palace Token

1x Fresh meat

5x Apples

1x Week Supply of Rations

Selection Rewards:

1. Divine Elixir of Escape
2. Explosion Scroll
3. Wind Master's Blade

[Please Choose]

The basic rewards were as bare as he'd expected. However, the selection rewards drew Sungchul's attention. They were quite balanced in value, Elixir of Escape and Explosion scrolls were consumed upon use, but in turn were very powerful. The Elixir guaranteed someone's survival during Pacman rules, and Explosion scrolls were powerful during Alamo rules or Deathmatch rules. The blade was also useful for people who had confidence in their own abilities. It raised their dexterity and added a critical strike effect. It would be a relevant weapon for a beginner until they left the Palace.

25 years ago, Sungchul chose the Windmaster's Blade. However this time, Sungchul chose the explosion scroll. The sword was useless to Sungchul and the explosion scroll had more utility to it than the Escape Elixir. The Elixir was only effective against demonic creatures, but the Explosion scroll could also be used on humans. It would be difficult, but the explosion scroll could be used to seriously wound the predators during Pacman rules.

Sungchul looked through the small package of rewards. Palace tokens, food, and explosion scroll. Sungchul packed up his rewards and returned to the training center. It was obvious, but the preselected were fine, some had even managed to get into the rankings.

“Taeksoo, that’s awesome! You’re third place. You got the highest score amongst us!”

The ranking results could be seen from numerous Stone of Records scattered around the palace. Sungchul looked at the record out of amusement.

- [1. Ahmuge – 142]
- [2. Chun Jungshik – 100]
- [3. Kim Taeksoo – 85]
- ...
- [6. Lee Yuhoon – 64]
- ...
- [21. Ha Yungjong – 44]
- [22. Kim Sungchul – 35]
- [23. Park Ahram – 29]

...

Sungchul allowed himself a strange smile. ‘Ahmuge and Chun

Jungshik. I’ve never heard of them.’

Sungchul recalled the face of the woman he saw during the battle. They had competed over the bonus monster, and she had been quite skilled. It might be that her name was amongst the two listed there.

Sungchul continued down the list until another name caught his eyes.

‘Park Ahram. A meager 29.’

It wasn’t intentional, but the zombie he had thrown during combat had hit Ahram on the head. Ahram not only fell unconscious due to that; but also had his Spirit Wolf summoning staff stolen.

Sungchul could see Ahram’s despondent face in the corner of the training center. He continued to skillfully operate the record stone.

[Would you like to see previous records?]

Sungchul visualized ‘Yes’ in his mind, and the messages in front of him changed.

[Historical Ranking]

[1. William Quinton Marlboro – 301]

[2. Shamal Lajiput – 275]

[3. Kim Sungchul – 256]

...

Looking at the records, he couldn't help but scratch his head.

‘William.. Shamal... Such nostalgic names. Even my name is in the records, I wonder what happened? Isn't it much easier now to set higher records than before?’

There weren't any privileged people in the past; only those with outstanding physical strength could face the oncoming demonic creatures. He had expected much better scores to arise compared to the past, but reality didn't reflect his expectations. Those preselected might just not have tried as hard after being coddled by the factions, or perhaps, the current generations of summoned might just have fallen in quality.

Sungchul felt satisfied with what he saw as he returned to the training center. Several Preselected were admiring their rewards. However, there were dark faces among them. The Preselected who received no reward, despite having been given privileges and advantages, could do nothing but hang their head as their comrades celebrated.

“Kim Hyung! Come here!”

Ha Yungjong shouted tactlessly across the center. He had a transparent glass in his right hand. It was the Divine Elixir of Escape.

“Kim Hyung has one too, right?”

Sungchul shook his head.

“No.”

“What? Why?”

“What do you mean why?”

“I saw that Kim Hyung also killed over 30 of ‘em. What did you pick? Did you ignore your guide and picked something else?”

Sungchul simply nodded, and Yungjong jumped up in shock.

“Dang... you’ve got guts. Mine said you could die on the next ranked match without one. That Pacman or something game.”

“Don’t worry about me.”

Yungjong had briefly talked to the others in the group, and they

had decided similarly. Their guides had probably urged them to get the item in order to guarantee their survival in the Pacman round. This must be why those without the rewards looked so grim.

“Uuu... Shit...”

Ahram, who was usually full of energy, also sat in a corner and picked at his nails. He had even lost his staff which was his failsafe.

There were others who were also marked for death among his group. Sungchul easily recognized the look of despair on their faces. It was the girl covered from head to toe in brand-name clothing that he had met on the first day.

Bae Sunghae.

She couldn't kill a single zombie. It wasn't because her strength was lacking; her weapon was better than the average preselected. Her score was 0 because she couldn't muster the courage to strike down a zombie. It could have been out of disgust or might have been out of fear. No matter the reason, the result was that she now had to worry about her immediate future.

Sungchul had felt her gaze on him for a while now. She kept peeking over at him every now and then. She couldn't approach him because Yungjong was making such a large ruckus next to him.

Previously, she had looked down on both of them. The reason

being that ugly, unsociable, shy men were the perfect target for mockery. Things were different now; her glamorous persona and her status as the daughter of a wealthy family in the real world had given her a golden ticket, which now had no value due to the failing score she had earned in this match. Even the ‘friends’ that had socialized with her during meals now completely ostracized her.

Shortly after, Sunghae finally approached Sungchul.

“Now! Now! Humans! You might catch some nasty disease from the zombies and corpses lying around! Let’s work to move them quick-quick!”

The homunculi brought over a goat-driven cart in order to load the corpses. Sungchul joined in the clean up and began tossing the bodies into the cart one at a time.

“Excuse me.”

He could hear a hesitant, yet familiar voice from behind him. Sungchul turned around and faced Sunghae. It wasn’t a confrontational glare but was also without any warmth. Sunghae felt tense receiving this sort of indifference.

“I... why do I have to... beg to him...”

However, this was a matter of life and death. Sunghae squeezed all of her strength into forming something similar to a smile on her

face.

“Hello?”

“What do you want?”

There wasn't even a second to waste on such a woman. Sungchul replied very curtly.

Sunghae already felt quite frustrated, and now she could only crawl even lower. She avoided Sungchul's chilling stare and spat out her rehearsed speech.

“Um... I am really sorry for the first day. It was all because I was so shocked and scared... I must not have been myself.”

“And you are here because?”

Sungchul quickly cut her off. Sunghae had always felt that, in all her years of popularity, she knew how animals called ‘males’ worked better than most. Her experiences told her that this man did not care to entertain her for even one bit; This conversation had been impossible from the start. Sunghae could feel a cold sweat trickling down her back.

“If that's all then.”

Sungchul turned around and began walking toward another pile

of corpses. She quickly blocked his path and spoke with a mocking tone.

“You’re also a man, right? A young one at that. How about having someone like me?”

She had abandoned her pride and threw herself at his feet. Sungchul continued looking at her with cold eyes and spoke plainly.

“What about you?”

“Stop pretending. I’ll just say it straight then; help me.”

“What do you want?”

Sunghae looked over at the staff tied down to Sungchul’s back. The energy bolt firing magical staff, Moonlight. With this, she might be able to overcome her weak resolve and raise her score. This was why she had approached Sungchul.

“That staff. Let me use it, and I’ll do anything you ask.”

As she finished, she unbuttoned the top of her shirt. Her cleavage peeked out tantalizingly from between her black brassiere.

“You must be frustrated after so long, right? I can do it right now if you want.”

People passing by looked at her with shock and disgust, but she had nowhere else to turn.

‘If I can just take his staff... It doesn’t matter what anyone says.’

However, Sungchul didn’t show any response. He looked at Sunghae’s cleavage with the same indifference as Warren Buffet would look at gold. Sunghae suddenly started feeling nervous.

‘This bastard... this guy hung around that catfish bastard... could it be...?!’

“Miss.”

Sungchul finally spoke, and Sunghae buttoned her top back up.

“Yes?”

He spoke indifferently while pointing at his lower half.

“I commend your courage, but mine doesn’t stand anymore.”

He turned and quickly left. Sunghae’s mind was spinning in chaos.

‘Rejected by a bastard like that... that smelly country hick

bastard!’

She was unaware that she hadn’t washed in a while either and now smelled just as bad, if not worse. However, Sunghae was a resilient woman. She caught up to him again and blocked his path once more.

“Move.”

Sungchul didn’t have any compassion this time. Sungbae couldn’t help but collapse under his frosty eyes; with its murderous intent that made her break out in goosebumps. Tears started pouring out of her eyes and her voice tumbled out pitifully.

“Please... please, that staff... let me use it.... please...”

Sunghae clung to him desperately.

“What are you going to give to me?”

Sungchul turned around. It wasn’t out of some half-baked sympathy, but to see if there was even a shred of something that he could get from this woman.

“W-what do you want?”

When she asked, he spoke in mysterious terms pointing above his own head.

“Ask him. Ask what he can offer me.”

Magicians didn't want their charges to die. It could be said that her guiding magician might be just as desperate as Sunghae. Sungchul recalled Krill's desperate face and laughed to himself.

Chapter 11 – Alchemist (2)

“Now, this is the place. Keep your promise.”

Putting everything aside, Haesung acted quickly. She brought her ‘bargaining chip’ within an hour since they had spoken, but that ‘chip’ wasn’t really what Sungchul had wanted. It was a hidden quest, but he felt disappointed as he unwrapped his ‘present’. Sunghae had brought a class change quest, but that wasn’t very outstanding. It was the Alchemist class.

There was a reason the Alchemist class was avoided like the plague. Magicians only needed to learn ‘fireball’ from the ‘Pyrokinetics’ branch of Magic School, then spend some of their mana to cast it. Alchemists also learned a similar ‘Magic Grenade’ from the Alchemic branch of Magic School, but it didn’t end there. They then had to spend time and effort to synthesize the potion, and even that had a chance of failure. Most people preferred the simpler power-to-investment ratio of other mage classes, while simply ignoring the alchemist class. People even mocked Alchemists as masochists.

“By following deep into this dried out well, I was told that you could get the ‘Hidden Class’: Alchemist.”

She emphasized the word ‘Hidden Class’, but Sungchul knew better. As someone that had went through hell and back, he knew that Alchemist was a trash class.

“I would like to refuse your offer.”

Sungchul didn't speak to Sunghae, but rather to the magician backing her.

"For what reason?"

Sunghae asked impatiently.

"I don't like it. Something like Alchemy... I'm confident in my ability to break stuff, but I hate putting things together. Bring me some other hidden quest, especially something that raises intuition, or I won't hand over the staff."

"... Wait. Just wait a bit."

Sunghae took a step back and turned around. She didn't speak for a while, so she must have been busy bleeding the magician dry. After a long while, Sunghae finally turned around, an awkward smile forming on her lips.

"You said you wanted a quest that raises intuition, right?"

Sungchul nodded in response.

"That's great then. The hidden quest that I proposed could raise your intuition by 15 when completed."

"15?"

It was an outrageous amount. The upper limit for stat gain from hidden quests, even missions, was below 10. This wasn't even a mission, and it raised a stat by 15? It was far outside of his expectation.

“That is hard to believe.”

“It's the truth! Well... it is only when all the requirements are completely met but...”

“Full completion?”

“Yes. My guide says it's normally 3~4 per objective with up to 5 for some. When you're completed with all the trials, it is possible to get up to 15.

“Can I believe that?”

Sungchul's eyes lit up brightly. Sunghae's eyes trembled in response, but it didn't seem from the fear of getting caught, but rather from fear of him.

“Yes, you can trust me.”

She bit her lips while nodding.

Sungchul handed her the magic staff, Moonlight.

“If you’re lying, there will be consequences.”

“D-do whatever you want!”

Sunghae’s voice shook as she escaped from the scene as quickly as she could.

Now, left on his own, Sungchul impassively stared into the well at the dry floor on the bottom.

—

Boom!

There was a ladder leading to the floor of the well, but Sungchul ignored it and simply leapt in. All the dust gathered on the floor made it difficult to see, but Sungchul was more interested in observing the faint magical energy that was surrounding the area.

[Wonder of the Generation. Memorial of the Eighth Hero, Eckheart]

‘Eighth Hero...? Eckheart?’

One of Sungchul’s brow rose. He had heard of the Seven Heroes,

but this was his first time hearing of an eighth one. He had never heard of the name Eckheart.

[You have observed the Wonder of the Generation.]

[The Amazing Test of the True Hero, Eckheart.]

Sungchul rarely expressed his emotions; however, the series of messages mentioning this person left him baffled

“... Who are you?”

Suddenly, the entire well shook slightly. It felt like someone was striking a distant wall. The well's wall opened after a while. This wasn't done by magic, but rather by some primitive device. The door struggled to open as though the machinery had rusted.

Looking at this scene, Sungchul couldn't help but feel regret. This felt extremely cheap compared to Vestiare's Dream.

‘It might be better not to go through with this.’

The alchemist class was an error by itself. He couldn't waste a precious subclass slot on a trash class which would only hamper his future growth. He could erase a useless class later on with Knowledge Reset, but it was still a troublesome thing to have to do.

Sungchul sighed in regret and turned around. However, a sudden message stopped him in his tracks.

[Would you pass by the Wonder of a Lifetime, like this?]

Sungchul didn't miss a beat as he continued to walk out, after which another message appeared before him.

[An amazing test of the Eighth Hero, Eckheart, the Wonder of the Generation]

* 1 Free Intuition JUST BY TRYING (15 Max!!!)

* Ancient Artifacts to be discovered

* A Familiar Reward with special objectives

* Opportunity for a mission

/// Try it now, all of this is FREE!]

“... what... is this?”

He had completed several thousands of quests and missions, but this was the first test of its kind. He could feel the quest maker's desperation, how few challengers must there have been for it to have reached this point?

‘Did they see this message when they told me about the 15 intuition?’

The magician guiding Sunghae seemed to have arrived at this point. There was no way to say whether that person was an alchemist or not.

“Mm...”

This was quite troubling. Sungchul was extremely weak against advertisements. Not that he fell for its seduction, but he rather enjoyed challenging the idea that it was automatically a lie. It couldn't be helped if it turned out to be a bust, but there was still a great deal of satisfaction whenever he won. It was one of the few joys he had in his life.

Sungchul tightened his grip and turned around once more. Rather than the 1 free intuition upon challenge, the familiar and mission opportunity tugged at his heartstrings. Whether this hidden quest continued into a mission depended completely on the grade of the quest-host, who had created this hidden quest, however...

“...”

Sungchul grabbed the door that had given up part way and tore it open. A series of candles lit themselves as he walked deeper into the well. He now found himself in a completely different area than before.

There were two bottles upon a pile of rocks: one was a red vial and the other a blue vial.

[First test of the Eighth Hero, Eckheart.]

[Grab the vials]

He positioned himself per the instructions. The blue vial was labeled Elixir of Frost, and the red vial was named Elixir of Fire. Once he grabbed both of the vials in his hand, a completion message appeared.

[You have grasped, the Wonder of the Generation, Eckheart's inheritance.]

[You have experienced the oppressive knowledge within Eckheart's inheritance]

Reward: Intuition +1

‘I haven’t felt anything like that.’

It was an annoyingly talkative quest, but at least it wasn’t lying about the rewards. Sungchul quickly confirmed the intuition he’d gained with his stat window. Another door suddenly shook awake, but as if there was a problem with its mechanism, it struggled to open once again. Sungchul forced his way through once more.

Beyond the door was a spherical area with a human-sized doll in the center. It appeared it be a golem. Sungchul couldn't help but doubt himself. He had never seen a golem so small. Golems were typically large; miniaturization of the internal components were difficult. Although their combat capabilities would be lacking, wooden marionettes were better suited to be of this size than stone golems.

‘Is that an actual golem?’

He had only entered this dungeon half-heartedly, but he now felt a bit more excited. A series of messages popped up once more.

[The Magic Golem created using the Eighth Hero's superior technology will be difficult for your current self to deal with.]

[However, it is the duty of Alchemists to make the impossible a reality!]

[Use the two colored vials to block the magic golem's attack! This is the Eighth Hero, the Wonder of the Generation, Eckheart's first test!]

Rumble-

The Magic Golem's eyes flashed as it began to move. Its movements were slow and exaggerated, but it was definitely a golem.

The Magic Golem turned itself in Sungchul's direction but then stopped. Sungchul waited to see what it was doing when it started glowing bright red.

Sungchul grabbed one of the two bottles which read: Elixir of Frost.

‘I guess he wants me to use this one.’

A chill, cold enough to freeze the air, poured out as he opened the bottle. Sungchul lobbed the Elixir of Frost at the Mana Golem.

Pssh-

The overwhelming cold of the elixir created white steam over the molten golem. The steam flooded out, covering the room before slowly beginning to subside. The Magic Golem again started to move.

This time, it began to emit a chilly blue aura. Sungchul tossed the final elixir in the same way, thereby neutralizing the chill. An overwhelming amount of steam flooded the room once more and subsided once again.

The Magic Golem stopped its operation, and its eyes lost its luster. A message appeared in the silence.

[You have perfectly neutralized the Magic Golem!]

[You have felt the Alchemist's Potential awaken deep inside of you!]

Reward: +1 Intuition

Scroll of Alchemists

“....”

Easy. It was laughably easy. Even if it wasn't a human, a dolphin or a chimpanzee might have been able to complete this quest as well. It was almost as if they were giving away the Alchemist class for free.

‘I always wondered why some people chose Alchemist as their main class, but I guess this is the answer.’

Ultimately, they were being scammed. They must have thought a ‘hidden class’ would separate them from everyone else and then spent their main class slot on it.

‘What an interesting fellow.’

Sungchul continued past the door that was behind the Mana Golem while having these thoughts. It led down a tunnel which was illuminated by an eerie red light and had bone chilling ambient noises.

[The true test starts from this point onwards.]

[For those that wish to know the true path, continue forth with resolution.]

Sungchul broke into a faint smile. He stored the Alchemist's scroll in his soul storage and pulled out Fal Garaz.

Wham!

Fal Garaz's impact shattered the Magic Golem, he then picked up one of the Golem's pieces. Curiosity sparked inside Sungchul; The heart shaped mechanism in his grip contained countless gears click-clacking together as they emitted some form of pure light.

'As to be expected, this isn't some low-grade creation like a marionette. This is a perfect internal mechanism from a golem. Peculiar to a degree I have never seen before.'

He dropped the mechanism and stood up.

Self-proclaimed Eighth Hero, Eckheart. Sungchul couldn't guess who this guy was, but if Eckheart was capable of making a golem of this level...? It had been a long time since he'd last smelled the rich scent of a jackpot. Like a thirsty man drawn to water, he headed down the corridor.

Chapter 12 – Alchemist (3)

As he continued forth, an altar came into view. The altar was wrapped in steel and copper and had a crude appearance. Two Mana Golems, sitting beside the altar, abruptly stood up.

[Unfurl the Alchemist's Scroll over the altar.]

Sungchul's eyes turned towards the altar. A considerable amount of mana could be felt coming from it. However, it felt different from a magician's mana. If a magician's mana could be compared to the constant rhythm of breathing, this mana had a consistent presence with no fluctuations. Sungchul began to picture the heart monitor at an emergency room.

‘This is a proper altar. It could almost sell me on this class all on its own.’

Eckheart, the person, was interesting, but he was not so interested in the alchemist class itself. Sungchul simply passed by the altar into the passage beyond. As soon as he entered, a message in red brought him to a stop.

[Only those with Alchemic abilities can challenge the trials which lay beyond.]

Several blades and hidden traps made intimidating noises as they activated from all sides. Looking at the message, Sungchul felt despondent. Only allowed to advance after becoming an Alchemist. What a childish trick.

Sungchul could pass through the traps with his own strength, but he felt like playing along for at least a little while longer.

[Alchemist's Class Scroll]

Grade: Rare – Hidden

Type: Class Change (Compact Form)

Effect: Acquire Hidden Class Alchemist

Restriction: None

Requirement: 20x Palace Token

Everything else was fine, but the Palace Tokens made him hesitate. Sungchul had 33 Palace Tokens. He needed 17 more Palace Tokens to become an Echo Mage. It wasn't like these Tokens were very easy to get, and there was the chance that he could be hit by some misfortune and miss his mark from becoming an Echo Mage. Taking this was like filling up on ramen before going to a high-class restaurant then missing out on the main course.

‘Mm... what to do...’

He didn't hesitate for too long. Sungchul reached into his pocket for 20 Palace Tokens and placed them along with the scroll, onto

the altar.

The reason he was confident in doing this was simple. He was humanity’s greatest warrior; there were two more rank matches left, and he could earn more than enough Palace Tokens just by maintaining a good rating. There was the risk however of being noticed by the spectators, but missing out on this curiosity would linger too much in the back of his mind.

‘What’s there to life? Might as well bet it all.’

Before this man, who has more enemies than friends, a lengthy message appeared.

[You have felt the breath of truth.]

[Congratulations! You have acquired the hidden class, Alchemist!]

Reward: Class – Alchemist acquired

Wind, interwoven with magic, blew out from the altar and wrapped around Sungchul’s body. The wind grew brighter and brighter and flowed even faster before finally disappearing into his body. He immediately opened his class window to take a look.

[Class]

Main Class – Primordial Warrior (Legendary)

Sub Class – High-class Chef (Rare)

Sub Class – Alchemist (Rare)

*2 Additional Sub Class slots available

He had acquired the Alchemist class. There were two Sub Class slots left; more than enough room for the Echo Mage class. Personally, it bothered him that he had wasted one of his precious Sub Class slots. But hadn't he done fine without worrying about his Sub Class slots so far? He reassured himself with these thoughts and continued past the altar, into the corridor. Unlike before, none of the traps were activated.

Past the hostile corridor, there sat a table and a stone cauldron. The cauldron lit up with bright orange flames and heated itself; while different kinds of minerals, plants, and shells from unknown organisms appeared as he stepped closer. A fearsome Mana Golem appeared on one side of the room, but it appeared to be wrapped tightly in something similar to a spider's web.

[The Fundamentals of Alchemy: Synthesis]

[Combine the prepared ingredients on the table and synthesize an item capable of freeing the Mana Golem.]

[Being unable to free the Mana Golem will result in disqualification.]

[Time limit is 10 minutes. There will be no second chances.]

This was a trial for Alchemists. Sungchul glanced over the ingredients on the table. There was some grass, a rock, a vial of water, some pieces of a shell, and other tedious bits of junk. He was at a loss with what he should do with the ingredients in front of him.

Sungchul continued to thoughtfully stare at the ingredients before holding up the grass then took a whiff.

It smelled just like grass.

After he'd finished smelling it, an unexpected message appeared in front of him.

[Grass of the Blind]

Level: 1

Grade: E

Attribute: Wood

Effect: None

Note: It is a commonly seen grass, but due to its agreeable nature, it is generally used as a buffer during alchemic experiments.

Here in Other World, appraisals were usually limited to weapons or potions that had some practical use. Grass, stone, or other natural objects could not be appraised at all, but more than that, only a few books, meant for herbalists and the like, contained any

information regarding these.

‘Is this a basic skill for alchemists?’

Sungchul checked the fine details of the Alchemist class window.

[Class: Alchemist]

Class Skill: Synthesis

Class Skill: Inspection

After reading about Inspection, Sungchul understood what had just occurred.

‘I must have gotten the message screen because of the Inspection skill.’

According to its description, an alchemist can determine the attributes of an ingredient after having a sniff. Sungchul continued to investigate the other materials in the same manner: Vaporizing Liquid, Riverside Stone, Glacial Crab’s Shell Fragment, etc. They all had their own description and effects.

Sungchul obtained all the information and pondered briefly before tossing the Vaporizing Liquid into the cauldron. The Vaporizing Liquid was the base, the foundation for the ingredients. The Riverside Stone with its polar attribute was pulverized by his fist, then tossed in afterwards. The Vaporizing Liquid emitted a

white light as the stone powder began to react with it.

Next, he pulverized then added the crimson wings of a butterfly. It was called Wings of the Infernal Butterfly. It contained a fire attribute that could be used to amplify a weaker ingredient. The Riverside Rock essence flared up as the crimson powder entered the cauldron and the liquid turned a bloody red. However, the Riverside Rock, added before the wings, had an earth attribute and began to emit a black smoke once it started mixing. To neutralize this, Sungchul added the Grass of the Blind which acted as a buffer. Once added, the black smoke stopped, and the cauldron turned purple.

Sungchul began to stir the cauldron with the large spoon next to the cauldron. This was when the Alchemist's next skill, Synthesize, would start to be useful. Every time the cauldron was stirred, he could feel a small amount of mana leaking out of him.

‘This must be why the alchemist class remains unpopular.’

After countless minutes of stirring, a bright light came pouring out of the cauldron.

[Synthesis Complete]

For the first time in a while, Sungchul felt his heart race in excitement as he checked his work. The product was a colorless, sticky liquid. He collected the liquid into a provided container then

inspected it.

[Low Grade Acid]

Level: 1

Grade: F

Attribute: Fire

Type: Common Clutter

Effect: It melts sticky substances

It was exactly the results he was looking for. He was slightly bothered by having used only some of the ingredients on the table, but he'd still managed to make something as he had intended. Sungchul took the low-grade acid and poured the liquid over the Mana Golem.

Ssssss-

The spider web emitted white smoke before slowly beginning to melt. Sungchul watched his success with smug eyes as he waited for the spiderweb to melt completely, but it didn't melt any further. He had used all of the acid but had only managed to melt some of the spider web. It seems he still needed to use the rest of his ingredients in some way.

[30 seconds before time limit ends.]

[Acid of Rank D or higher required to melt the spider web.]

[Before the road of truth, a peerless mind is required. Those without talent shall be turned away.]

There was no more time or ingredients to spare, but it was also a waste for him to turn back now.

“....”

Another message appeared as if to mock him.

[10 seconds before time limit ends.]

[Turn back! You who lacks talent!]

It was once said, a man will be more willing to make promises when he needs to use the bathroom, than when he's already used it. Sungchul couldn't help but feel this was an apt saying to describe his situation. He stood over the Mana Golem, looked over the spider web, before roughly spitting out a single phrase.

“Aaaah, fuck it!”

He pulled apart the spider web covering the Mana Golem with his bare hands.

Rip!

It was something that could never be pulled apart by a normal human, but before Sungchul's divine strength, it was no different than any other type of spider silk. The Mana Golem's eyes lit up as the spider web covering it was harshly pulled apart.

“Thank you for freeing me. You have great talent as an alchemist. I will lead you to the next test.”

[You have torn the Spider Queen's silk, which even a legendary blade could not sever.]

Reward: +2 Intuition

Getting lost is fine as long as you didn't end up in another city; freeing the Mana Golem was the only requirement for the test. Creating the acid was only one of the methods to passing the test. Of course, this probably wasn't the intention of the quest-host who had created this quest; because, no matter how sharp or powerful the weapon, it would still take no less than 10 minutes to unravel this web. The only thing the host could not have foreseen would be Sungchul's overwhelming strength.

After passing the first test with ease, Sungchul headed towards the next course. Another trial, similar to the previous one awaited him. He'd failed the first time, but he wouldn't make the same mistake twice. Sungchul used his wealth of experience and adaptability, and his occasionally surprising wit to move forward. If all else failed, he temporarily unsealed his massive strength to

brute-force through each one of Eckheart's tests. Now, as he approached the final trial, a massive three-headed golem stood to block his path.

[Eighth Hero, Eckheart's final exam]

[The ingredients prepared before you is a seed of possibilities.]

[No questions asked. Destroy the Three-headed golem!]

The requirements were simple, and by now, Sungchul had also become tired of all of the tests. He directly pulled out Fal Garaz and smashed the Golem across the chest.

SLAM!

[You have completed all of Eckheart's exams and come to accept the glorious potential of Alchemy.]

[Eighth Hero Eckheart could not be more excited to bestow his inheritance on you who has completed all of his tests.]

Reward:

1. Creationist's Scroll
2. Familiar: Living Book Bertelgia
3. Eckheart's Portable Golden Cauldron

The rewards fell in front of Sungchul. There were two books. One of which was significantly larger, but as he reached for it, it floated into the air as if to reject him.

“Ah... what a blatant scam artist...”

A depressed and frosty little girl's voice sounded out, but it wasn't coming from a human...

“... This is the worst. For such a person to now be my master.”

...the voice was coming from the book.

Chapter 13 – Pacman Rule (1)

“You’re definitely not a normal person. I hadn’t seen how you had passed the intricate first test with your thick skull, but looking at how easily you took care of the Battle Golem personally created by Eckheart...”

The flying book spoke with its pages fluttering about as though it were alive.

“You might be good enough to be a mid-grade guild master or the general of a small nation, right?”

“....”

It wasn’t the first time that he had seen a familiar. He had received several familiars from his friends in the past, but whether it be plant or animal, they’d all died quickly in his hands.

“What are you?”

Sungchul asked the book.

“Me?”

The large book stopped its movements, and Sungchul nodded impassively.

“I am Bertelgia. A living book, as you can see. I have ended up as your familiar. Not that I want to be.”

She spoke like a tsundere, but her attitude wasn't what mattered to Sungchul.

“What are you capable of?”

This was the only question that mattered.

Bertelgia was struck dumb for a moment, before speaking again in a depressed voice.

“It's very rude how you are treating me like a tool, but seeing as I have no personal desire to get close to you either, I'll accept your behaviour. As you can see, I am a living book.”

Bertelgia began opening her pages on her own accord, revealing the contents written within to Sungchul. Some of Bertelgia's pages contained elaborate formulates and calligraphy, complete with images, all working towards a common vision of Alchemy.

“Contained within me is all of the knowledge left behind by Eckheart, self-proclaimed Eighth Hero. Eckheart wasn't a very smart guy, so the knowledge isn't all that great, but... Hey! Don't touch!”

Sungchul found himself forcefully flipping through the pages.

“If you want to see something, you can just tell me! I’ll find it and show it to you!”

Bertelgia struggled desperately, trying with all her might to break free of his grasp.

“Yea?”

Sungchul let go of her. Bertelgia, finally freed from his monstrous strength, shot up to the ceiling before floating back down to where she had been before.

“Yes. Just ask away. Eckheart was a mediocre alchemist, but he also had some clever tricks.”

“Mm....”

Sungchul gazed off into the distance, before staring sharply at the book.

“Can you undo the Curse of Extinction?”

At the mere mention of the curse, a memory he had been suppressing bubbled up in his mind. Bertelgia twirled from left to right.

“Oh? That? That guy also tried solving it, but he didn’t succeed.”

“I see.”

He wasn’t disappointed because he didn’t have any expectation in the first place. He bent down to pick up the other book from the floor.

[Creationist’s Scroll]

Grade: Legendary

Type: Class Transfer (Compact)

Effect: Legendary Class Creationist Acquired

Note: My beloved daughter shall lead you to the True Path of Wisdom.

“What is this?”

Creationist; a legendary grade class. It was a class that Sungchul, who was steeped deep in the lore and knowledge of Other World, had never heard of before. Not only that, but the requirement was also odd. It was unreasonable to request something from the daughter of someone who was at least a few thousand years old.

It wasn’t long before Bertelgia began to speak again.

“Can’t you read? That is the Creationist’s Scroll.”

“And where is Eckheart’s daughter? Won’t she be dead by now?”

“Who died? She’s right here.”

Bertelgia put herself on display like some kind of bird as she flapped her pages. Sungchul stopped breathing and focused his sharp senses to search through his surroundings, but he couldn’t sense any other presence around him.

“Where is ‘here’?”

After Sungchul asked for clarification, Bertelgia shoved her paper-packed body towards him and spoke as she sighed.

“Really, you can’t even see who is right in front of you... I’ll reintroduce myself then. I am the child of the self-proclaimed Eighth Hero, Eckheart’s daughter, Bertelgia. I am your familiar who will be guiding you on the path of becoming the Creationist.”

He had gained 15 Intuition, a never-before-seen class, and a familiar who claimed to be the daughter of Eckheart. He would have to wait and see how the Creationist’s Scroll would work along with Bertelgia; nevertheless, this must all have been a test of some sort.

“Hello? Mr. Muscle-head? Can you hear me?”

Sungchul smirked as Bertelgia let out her sharp words.

Night had already fallen by the time he reached the plaza. Sungchul headed towards a clearing near the training center where the Preselected were staying. Everyone had followed after Yuhoon and went to sleep. Sunghae appeared to be sleeping, her arms were wrapped around the staff, but on closer inspection, she was actually cautiously looking over in his direction with her barely opened eyes.

Sungchul headed towards his own spot further away from the main group. An appreciated guest was waiting at Sungchul's sleeping space made from the clothes of the dead.

“Kyu kyu!”

It was the Sky Squirrel that was following Krill Regall. Like before, there was a pouch with a message tied to the tiny paws of the Sky Squirrel. He fed the creature some bread crumbs before retrieving the message.

[1. More bribes needed. Urgent.

2. Rules of the next rank match changed. Pacman Rules / Tam Tam

3. Requested standard for distribution of rewards: 1st – 100% / 2nd – 80% 3 – 60% 4 – 40%

P.S. Without additional bribes, I might not be able to send out

this guy anymore.]

After grinding the note into powder with his fingers, he sat up on a training dummy and began to contemplate.

‘It’s Pacman rules, with a Tam Tam included to boot.’

It was the worst combination of the most difficult rule with the worst of the monsters. Pacman rule was one of the many different types of rank matches that distributed scores based on the number of people who managed to survive against a powerful creature within the time limit. It might be argued that other rulesets still allowed the survivors the opportunity to fight back; Pacman rules, however, offered no such opportunity. They released a monster that even a mid-grade fighter, not to mention the newbies, would not stand a chance against alone. The only way to stay alive against such a monster was to keep away from it until it managed to eat its fill.

The creature, Tam Tam, was one of the weakest monsters that the Summoning Palace kept. It was one of the more popular monsters to be hunted. However, there was a valid reason that this monster was called the nightmare of all newbies. While other monsters hunted humans solely to serve as food, the Tam Tam would play with its food. The number of casualties it caused had not once fallen below that of the other monsters.

‘Are the Preselected within the Blanche plaza lacking? I thought the Order of Iron Blood Knights was a big name around here, maybe they still hadn’t completely recovered from the Demonic

Force's second invasion?'

Blanche Plaza wasn't the only plaza that had preselecteds. All four of the plazas had powerful factions backing their own group of preselected. There was a group of preselected within each plaza, all receiving their own special privileges, but if you look past the individual plazas, there was an even larger problem inside the Summoning Palace. There was a discrepancy of privileges among the preselected as well.

The preselected backed by the most powerful faction within the Summoning Plaza had the easiest trials, while others would receive much more challenging trials. The Blanche Plaza had received the trial that was rumoured to be the most difficult of all trials, the Tam Tam.

Sungchul vividly recalled the disfigured, oversized monkey; the brutal, savage monster that toyed with its victim as it senselessly rampaged, killing many people; His companions who had numbered over 500 were reduced to below 50 in just one match. The plaza, soaked completely in blood, was a scene he could recall vividly even to this day. This might have been why Krill had emphasized his need for additional bribes. He knew that the Tam Tam would be in the next match and had no expectation that Sungchul would survive.

Sungchul pulled out a rose-tinted ruby and placed it into the Sky Squirrel's pouch, then pet the squirrel's head with a bent finger.

"Kyu Kyu!"

The Sky Squirrel disappeared into the night sky.

Sungchul closed his eyes and began his planning to the sound of the preselected stirring in their sleep.

‘The difference in rewards between ranks is larger than I’d expected.’

According to Kill’s information, the highest ranking plaza will earn more than twice the reward of the lowest ranking plaza. This means that, within the last ranking plaza, there will be a limit to how much an individual can earn as it would be split by what is effectively 40% of the first rank’s total reward. This difference will be critical. Being in a lower ranked plaza will lead to earning relatively fewer Palace Tokens.

There was also another problem, which was the Tam Tam’s presence. Leaving it alone would not only guarantee Blanche Plaza’s continual last place but would also make the following Death Match rules all the more difficult for them. There was only one way to avoid this disaster; he would need to get rid of the Tam Tam.

He now needed to find a way to kill it without being discovered. The Pacman match would inevitably draw a crowd of onlookers that would come to enjoy the senseless violence and chaos within the Summoning Palace. If he revealed his strength at that time, he would immediately draw their attention, and various nations and guilds would start sending their executioners after him. There was

no other way to solve it; Sungchul looked back at Sunghae, she was cautiously watching him through the slit of her eyes with an anxiously beating heart.

—

It wasn't like there was a strict standard or anything, but a large demonic creature would usually be classified as a monster. To be more exact, large demonic creatures that had a lower intelligence would be classified as monsters. Tam Tams were smarter than most monsters, but still weren't smarter than the average creature and were thus classified as a monster. The Tam Tam was a 12 meter tall, massive primate. It could run quickly, use its extended arms cooperatively with its legs, and like a human, was able to freely manipulate objects. Its strength was lacking in comparison to other monsters, but it could still split a man in half with just its spear-like teeth. This did mean, however, that it wasn't a completely impossible threat for the newbies to face.

There was an appreciable amount of strength gathered by the summoned since the first ranking match. There will be those who have come to realize their true potential, others who went to explore the woods seeking to train. Attempting to gauge this potential would be like trying to gather infinity from zero, but Sungchul still wanted to try raising their potential significantly.

‘There doesn't need to be a lot of them. I only need to gather a few useful people. These people can be the ones to injure the Tam Tam while I will be the one to use the explosion scroll to finish the job without needing to draw too much suspicion on myself.’

The preselected were the ideal candidates for this purpose, but most of them had already acquired the Divine Elixir of Escape. They couldn't be counted on for his plan. They would secure their own survival by slathering on the contents of the elixir and going to hide in a corner.

Fortunately, there were also a few among them who haven't received the Divine Elixir of Escape. Ahram and Sunghae were the ideal example of this. In total, there were four such people, including that pair, who haven't gotten the elixir; Sungchul approached the one he was already acquainted with: Sunghae.

“...What do you want from me? I believe I've kept my promise, haven't I?”

She quickly drew the staff behind her as she spoke out nervously. Her voice caught the attention of two nameless preselected men who began to approach her from the side. It seemed as if someone had predicted that he would approach her, and had prepared a few bodyguards in advance. However, this kind of petty planning meant nothing to Sungchul.

“I didn't come here to take away the staff. I'm just here to give you a warning.”

Sungchul pointed to above his head, and her tension dropped by a small bit.

“Didn't your guide tell you? What the upcoming rank match would be?”

“I’ve heard of it. Pacman? He said it would be Pacman rules.”

“You know which monster is going to be in this Pacman game, right?”

“Mmm, maybe I do...”

“Tam Tam”

“Tam Tam? That’s a funny name.”

“It’s a funny name, but it doesn’t act funny. Do you have an item that can replace the Divine Elixir?”

Sunghae pulled out Moonlight and spoke in a trembling voice.

“Isn’t this enough?”

Sungchul looked at the staff with chilling eyes and shook his head.

“That kind of thing can’t guarantee your life.”

Sungchul turned around, a heavy voice rang out as he faced them with his broad back.

“If you want to live, come find me with everyone that doesn’t have an Elixir in the forest.”

No one would have imagined that something like this could ever have happened when they were summoned. The man, with the most pitiful appearance among the 25 preselected, would now be looking down and commanding the most glamorous woman among them, but a week’s time had been long enough to completely change all the former rules.

*

“You there... Hello?”

Sungchul looked out to the three preselected who were cautiously approaching from the direction of the forest entrance.

Chapter 14 – Pacman Rule (2)

[Ten Thousand Sword Swings (Daily),
Ten Thousand Dummy Strikes (Daily),
Thousand Lifts with Every Dumbbell in the Training Center (Daily),
Eight Thousand Blade Dummy Dodges (Daily),
Thousand Laps around the Plaza (Daily),
Low Grade Monster Hunts,
Low Grade Monster x10 Hunts,
Mid Grade Monster Hunts...]

This was only a part of the list Sungchul had scratched out on the dirt with twigs for the preselected. The list of seemingly impossible tasks had a total of thirty entries in it, causing those who were reading to become slack-jawed.

“This is the list of common quests that I’ve been suggested to do by my guide, and they increase the three basic stats: Strength, Dexterity, and Vitality. If you don’t believe me, then check with your own guide.”

There were a few false ones mixed in, but the majority of them were real; he borrowed the authority of the guides to convince the preselected before him, leaving the responsibility of proving his words to their guides. The three preselected showed hostility, but they also couldn’t say no to his face.

“I won’t force you. You can spill sweat and train like your lives depend on it, or you can spill your blood at the Rank Match tomorrow in front of the other preselected. It’s up to you.”

There were a total of four preselected gathered here: Ahram, Sunghae, and her two bodyguards. Ahram, despite being a latecomer, only listened to a bit of the explanation then left while yawning. He leaned on a tree off in the distance and began to hum to himself, attempting to nap. He was the epitome of carefree irresponsibility. What would someone, who even looked down on the Drill Sergeant, have to fear?

Only three people remained listening to Sungchul’s advice.

“Excuse me.”

A pale hand rose in the middle of the uncomfortable silence, it was Sunghae’s.

“You are certain that there will be an effect if we do all of this, right?”

“Open your status windows. Ignoring the other stats, your strength, dexterity, and vitality don’t exceed 20, do they?”

The eyes of Sunghae and the other two becomes unfocused as they looked at their status screens. Sungchul looked over towards Sunghae and said.

“How does your strength, dexterity, and vitality look?”

“Eh. They are 15, 16, and 16.”

All three preselected had similar stats. It wouldn't be surprising for the average summoned to be limited at around 10, but it was disappointing for the quality of the preselected to only be this high.

“My average numbers are higher than 20 though?”

They heard a familiar voice, it was Ahram. He had been leaning on a tree trunk pretending to sleep while actually listening to everything they'd said.

“I said, I got more than 20! So I don't have to do that stupid list, right?”

Sungchul completely ignored him. Instead, he turned his head and called out loudly.

“Come out.”

A man revealed himself from deeper in the forest. It was Loner #2: Ha Yungjong

“Ah, this is a bit embarrassing. Do I havta do this?”

The other preselected stiffened. It was quite unpleasant for them to be associating with just Sungchul, but now there was another unpleasant face in the mix.

Sungchul didn't mind the chilling gaze that the two of them were being shot with and spoke to Yungjong.

“Yungjong, how are your stats?”

“Ah, Kim hyung. I really don't like doing things like this.”

“Come on, it's not hard. I'll even grill you some meat.”

At the mention of meat, Yungjong opened his stat window and revealed his stats with a bitter smile.

“Now lookie here. Strength 28. Dexterity 27. Vitality 25. That's it.”

The other preselected were shocked by the numbers.

“How can that be? That bastard's stats are higher than mine?”

Ahram rose with a stretch from his tree trunk. A mysterious smile appeared on his face.

“Some bitch like this is better than I am? Huh? Don’t joke around with me! Fuck! This guy with a rotten expression is better than me?”

No one knew what had bothered him to such a degree, but Ahram was clearly angry.

“I’m already pissed for getting bitched at for losing the staff, and now some bitches are trying to fuck with me.”

The rotten interior hidden underneath his handsome exterior revealed itself. He began looking over everyone with hatred in his eyes before eventually screaming out spitefully.

“Hey! Fuck it! Don’t even bother! What do you fuckers know. Fucking worthless idiots. Do you know who my backer is, do you?”

Everyone either turned their gazes or simply ignored him completely.

Ahram, who was throwing a tantrum like some drunkard, suddenly reached out and grabbed Sunghae’s wrist.

“What?”

Sunghae looked aghast and pulled out of his grip. Ahram smiled lecherously and reached out for her once again.

“Do you know who my backer is, Sunghae? Hm?”

“What the fuck do I care about that?”

“Oh shit~ Look who’s talking back now. What a step up for a whore like you.”

“What? What did you just say?”

Sunghae jumped back in surprise and reached for Moonlight, seeming ready to kill.

Ahram pointed at her staff and looked at her mockingly.

“Am I wrong? You got that fucking staff, from that hobo, for one night.”

“Are you crazy?”

“Give me a turn. Don’t act so coy. I can get you something better than that shit if I ask my guide, Dolorence or some shit like that. Come on!”

Ahram struck Sunghae’s staff out of her hand and once again held her wrists.

“Let me go! I’ll kill you!”

Sunghae struggled with her all her might, but her strength couldn't overcome Ahram's. Ahram dragged Sunghae by her arms to some taller bushes, in plain sight of everyone. He continued laughing the whole time; he was like a crazed dog that had broken free of its leash. Even the two men who'd assigned themselves as Sunghae's bodyguards could do nothing but watch with their heads lowered.

“...”

A man stepped up just as Sungchul was about to move. It was Yungjong.

“Little baby, shut up now, you hear? Or else, your chin just might go flying.”

Ahram would often throw a tantrum over every little thing, but this time, he went far over the deep end.

“What?”

Ahram glared, eyes blinded by anger. He impatiently stomped towards Yungjong and stiffly got in his face.

“Flap those gums again, bitch. You stinkin' garb...”

The impact of a punch rang out. Yungjong's fist had squarely

collided with Ahram's face. Ahram who was sprawled across the floor with his face turned around abnormally, uttered an unnatural scream.

“ageaaaAAa!”

The insult that had been on the tip of his tongue must have been deformed by the blow into the current unsettling noise. Ahram twitched like a cockroach that had been sprayed with bug poison and could do nothing but grip the dirt in anger after being fed such a solid punch.

“Rrr.... Rrr.....”

It felt anticlimactic as everything was resolved under the message of, ‘A stick is the only medicine for an unruly dog’. Ahram soon left the area, muttering profanities under his breath as he went.

“You’ll all see. Fuckers. I’m going to get my faceless daddy* to fucking crush all of you. Bitches... Just you wait. Just you wait...”

The most cowardly threats could be heard leaking past the trees.

After Ahram left, Sungchul gathered the group again and spoke to them.

“I’ll be in the plaza. If there is anything you want to ask regarding the common quests, don’t hesitate to come to me.”

Sungchul left the Preselected behind and left the forest with Yungjong. Yungjong leaned over to him and whispered.

“Uh... shit. I ended up blowing it. That was the one bitch I shouldn’t have hit.”

He had acted instinctively, but there seemed to be a lot of regret remaining.

“Ah... what should I do? Shit... Should I apologize later?”

Yungjong turned out to actually be quite a decent guy. His mouth was foul, and his appearance was intimidating, but he always supported his friends. It was rare to find a person like this within the Summoning Palace where everyone’s true face was soon revealed.

“Then why did you step up? I could have dealt with it myself.”

“Ah... but that bitch was so uppity. Really though... I did do it but... whew...”

“It’s fine. Don’t worry about it. Didn’t you see him call his guide some shit? The guide probably wants to thank you for dealing with that asshole.”

“R...right? It’d be sweet if that was the case.”

His face relaxed after being reassured. He had punched out of anger, but it wasn't enough to calm his anxiety.

“Anyways, Kim hyung. Do you think those kids will actually do as you said? They're as spoiled as they come.”

“Well, It's their loss if they don't. Your example will only be of benefit to them.”

“Okay. Also, let me taste that amazing meat that you were talking about. I've only been eating that trashy bread, and I want to chew something which has meat juices flowing.”

“I'm not bragging, but I'm confident in my cooking skills. I'll be grilling it for dinner, so don't come crying to me if you've filled up on Homunculus bread.”

“Of course. I'll be waiting!”

Yungjong returned to the training center with his thumb in the air.

Now that Sungchul was alone, he looked around the plaza center a bit. He was looking at the established factions between the average summoned.

‘It's not enough with just the minority of the preselected.

Everyone's stats has to be raised across the board.'

He looked over the exterior of the people gathered in the plaza with passive eyes. He quickly found what he was looking for. That middle-aged office worker that had wanted to gather people to form a group on the first day; he had become the leader of the largest faction in the Blanche Plaza.

Chapter 15 – Pacman Rule (3)

The middle-aged office worker was called Kim Hakchul. In the real world, he had been the division leader of a mid-sized company. He had neither great physical strength nor superior intellect, but he had the determination to preserve righteousness and good. He wished to gather people in order to end chaos and violence which ruled the place and restore public order.

The group which started out with only a few people who shared his ideals grew to the current size of 500 people after the first ranked match. This was indisputably the largest faction within the Blanche Plaza.

However, this faction had a critical weakness. Due to their open door policy, they were mostly composed of people who were weak in body and spirit. Hakchul also enforced an equal distribution policy emphasizing that all rewards had to be split evenly among all of their members. This resulted in too many leeches infesting his organization despite his ideals. The problem was exacerbated during the last rank match, as those who were starving because they hadn't been able to kill a single zombie all flocked to this group to get a free handout. This allowed the group to explode in membership, but the internal stability and happiness were at the brink of collapse.

It was an organization on its last leg, but Sungchul decided first to approach this group simply because of their numbers. Their large membership meant that even the smallest increase in overall combat strength would show a greater effect than any other faction. Raising the strength of 500 people by 1 was easier than raising a single person's strength to 500. It wasn't realistically

possible for the group's overall strength to increase by 500. However, it was important for them to get as close to it as possible.

“I have something to say.”

Sungchul waited for an opportunity to approach Hakchul. Hakchul was surprised by Sungchul's sudden appearance but welcomed him amiably.

“You're one of the people hanging out at the training center. Ok, what did you want to talk about?”

Looking up close, Hakchul looked weaker and more pitiful than Sungchul had expected. His eyes were still resolute in his ideals, but his wrinkled face showed his doubt and his anxiety. He looked as though the uncertainties of his future was starting to affect him.

‘This man.... He's bearing a burden beyond his capacity.’

Sungchul had seen many different types of people in this world. Too many times he had seen pure ideals get corrupted or ruin lives. Lofty goals, hanging high in the sky, seem so clearly defined; but every path leading up to it is shrouded in fogs of doubt and uncertainty. Hakchul was just one of many that were lost in this fog.

“Look at this.”

Sungchul showed the same list of common quests to Hakchul as

he had shown the Preselected.

“There will be a rank match soon. This one will be incomparably more terrifying than the previous one. Please warn your companions and advise them to raise their strength.

“Thank you. All this is...”

Hakchul appeared to be very grateful at first, but as soon as he looked over the contents himself, he suddenly drew back. Sungchul’s observant gaze didn’t miss the other’s hesitation. Hakchul grew more and more hesitant the further he read.

“I have read it over, and I am grateful for your help.”

“It’s not enough to be grateful. You need to at least tell your people about the strength-enhancing quests, right now.”

“For the strength-enhancing quest... That was ten thousand sword swings... but ten thousand...”

“Is there a problem?”

“I mean it’s one thing to say the number ten thousand. But, who would actually swing that many times? One might say that it would be crazy of them. I’ll let the people know, but I doubt that anyone will follow through with it.”

He spoke amiably, but in a skeptical tone. Some of his subordinates who were next to him simply laughed.

“Exactly. Who would do that kind of exercise?”

“Can’t do it. We’re running low on food now, and you want us to move around?”

“It’s impossible. Not even worth trying.”

They were the expected responses. Hakchul’s faction had the largest number, but the large mass of people didn’t allow effective control. Hakchul could give advice to his subordinates, but he lacked the authority to force them into action. This was the limit of Hakchul’s faction.

‘This will be difficult. These people...’

Sungchul pointed off to the other end of the plaza and spoke frostily.

“What you guys are discussing won’t even be up for discussion for them.”

“Mmm...”

“At least try to force your most trusted men. If you can’t, you should get ready to go through hell.”

He had said everything there was to be said. Their reaction was still lukewarm. There was nothing more to expect from Hakchul's faction. The result was completely below his expectations, but Sungchul moved on to the next location unfazed.

He arrived at the western end of the plaza where the food cart that the homunculi used was stationed.

“Now now! Humans! We'll give out some food! Don't spill it, make sure to eat everything!”

The homunculi tossed around rotten food in their usual mocking manner. However, a group of muscular men stood in everyone's way.

“Shove off! You wanna try me?”

“Anyone who gets closer is dead! Hey! Red hood over there! You wanna die? Ey!”

They had surrounded the cart and monopolized the food by force. They swung their blades and shouted at those starving that were approaching the cart. These men were only numbered in the hundreds, but the others could only bitterly swallow their spit as they looked on from a distance. This was the second faction Sungchul had decided to approach.

Unlike Hakchul and his faction, this group had gathered only for

profit, and they only had one rule: strength.

‘That guy is the leader, right?’

A man was sitting arrogantly in the middle of the group; he was holding the food and had a beauty at his side. He looked to be in his early-thirties. His stamina was average, and he didn’t appear particularly strong, but his eyes had a peculiar luster. His lean muscles were covered in yakuza-like tattoos, putting his former life on full display. Sungchul headed towards this man.

“Who’re you?”

There was a rough looking subordinate blocking his way.

“I have something I want to say to your boss.”

“Who gave you the right?”

Sungchul lightly pushed the thug to the ground and continued forward, and the arrogant man gestured to the girl beside him to leave before staring back at him icily.

“You, who are you?”

Sungchul knew the man’s name: Chun Jungshik. With his grit, even though he had no particular ‘abilities’, he had still taken care of 100 zombies at the first rank match. He was someone who

exceeded the collective score of the specially privileged preselected. He truly had the natural talent to be a warrior. Jungshik probably didn't know about the Observer's Eye that had been placed on top of his head. Someone had already called dibs on him. It was rare for someone to receive this level of attention after only the first Rank Match.

“I've got something to say.”

Sungchul said the same thing he'd told Hakchul, Jungshik however, listened to him with curious interest. The list of common quests was written below Jungshik's feet.

“So you're saying that if I do this list of things you told me, my stats will increase?”

“That's right. However, the highest you can train up to with daily quests is 25.”

“25, eh? My boys are around 10 to 12, so they'll get twice as strong if I get them to grind this out, right?”

It was an entirely different reaction from Hakchul. He spoke with clear confidence that all of his group members would completely comply with his orders.

‘This is a dangerous fellow.’

This wasn't some simple talent, but a man who had a natural

tendency for violence. Looking at Jungshik's eager eyes, he recalled a companion that had become his enemy over time.

“Good. I'm right, right? How about we give it a try?”

Jungshik stood and shouted towards a subordinate.

“Hey, bring me my blade.”

Jungshik's subordinate respectfully brought the blade, offering it over with both hands.

It was the Blade of Swiftness. Jungshik gripped the blade in his left hand and glared at Sungchul with feral eyes before warning him.

“Stay right there. If you're lying, I'm going to have to skin you.”

Sungchul replied with a bright smile on his face.

“Don't forget what I said. The quests won't raise your strength past 25.”

“Yea? That's convenient. My strength just hit 24.”

One of Sungchul's brow shot up. If he wasn't lying, it was an impressive growth.

‘This guy... he’s quite impressive.’

As soon as Jungshik finished speaking, he began to swing his Blade of Swiftness at a fearsome speed, and his goons surrounded Sungchul, all with a dangerous expression on their faces.

Before long, ten thousand swings had been finished. Jungshik wiped off his brow with a towel that was presented by one of his subordinates and checked over his stats.

“Oh wow.”

Jungshik smiled with great satisfaction. He immediately gathered his gang and shouted.

“Gather around. From now on, it’s time for hellish training.”

Sungchul was no longer on his mind. He was soaked in excitement at the prospect of strengthening his faction that he had already forgotten about Sungchul’s existence. Sungchul left the group of men who were swinging blades with fervor and began thinking to himself.

‘We need those kinds of people at times too.’

Jungshik’s faction would probably grow at a scary pace under Jungshik’s authority as long as he obtained a way of raising their

strength. However, Hakchul had been given the same cards, yet his group didn't show any particular attempt to follow through with it. They just stared blankly from a distance like cattle, while Jungshik's group trained diligently. They might be 5 times larger than Jungshik's group, but at this rate, comparing the two factions will be like comparing heaven and earth.

“Hey! Don't screw around! Hurry! Hurry up and do this so we can sweep up those annoying bastards”

Jangshik's sharp commands drew a clear vision of the future for Sungchul.

‘Hakchul's faction is soon going to get eaten up by Jungshik's faction.’

If Jungshik didn't get his hands on the common quest list, his faction would never have had enough strength to overcome such large numbers. There might be a bloodbath before the actual rank match between the factions. This was one of the basic natures of humans. However, this was aligned with Sungchul's objectives.

‘I have to use everything available to me in order to kill the Tam Tam and secure Blanche Plaza to number 1 during the rank match. This is the most surefire way to getting all the Palace Tokens I need into my grasp.’

He made his way out of the plaza as the sound of Jungshik group's martial cries faded away.

The Rank Match was, but a few days away, it was a rigorous training process. The Preselected were physically exhausted, but with the danger of death looming over them, and Sungchul's guidance, they had managed to become fighters capable of holding their own in the next 5 days. They were now fighters that had an average strength, dexterity, and vitality higher than 25. This was the greatest force that Sungchul had for the upcoming Rank Match.

He watched over his preselected who had grown enough that he let out a content smile as he brought out some prepared gifts. It was a slab of meat wrapped in leaves; this was the reward he had received six days ago. Other summoned had greedily eaten their shares on the day they received it, but Sungchul was different. He had flavored the meat with salt and pepper, then fermented the meat in a dry location after wrapping it in leaves.

“Wasn't this from a week ago? It must be rotten by now...”

Sunghae dried off her sweat and looked over the meat. Sungchul silently unwrapped the leaves.

It looked completely dry at first glance, and parts of it had turned black, but for those that knew their meat, it told a different story.

“Dry aging?”

One of Sunghae's brows shot up. He nodded and wrapped the meat up again.

“I don't mean to boast, but I am confident in my cooking.”

In reality, Sungchul was a master chef, due to this sub class: High class Chef. His skills would've embarrassed even chefs of the royalties.

He placed the wrapped meat on top of a wide flat stone then grilled it patiently at a slow rate. The cathedral was filled with a delicious aroma.

“Wow~ That smells awesome.”

Yungjong wiped off some drool with his sleeves and begged to have a piece. The two bodyguards and even the wealthy princess, Sunghae, was not an exception. They all waited for it to be cooked, their eyes glued to the meat.

It had been two weeks since the mass summoning which had brought them here, and all this time, they only managed to eat hard bread and apples. No one had eaten proper food in a long while, and now that the greatest chef had prepared some food for them, how could they not start losing their composure?

Sungchul finally cut open the leaves wrapping the meat with his beginner blade and revealed the meat within.

Chiiiiik-

The meat juices and the aroma stuffed within the leaves exploded out and melted the last few bits of awkwardness between them. Sungchul expressionlessly acknowledged the meat and nodded his head.

“It’s good to eat now.”

With a cheer, they began their feast. Delicious food always improved the mood; the four preselected gathered here forgot their differences and fully soaked in Sungchul’s world of delicious flavors. Conversation flowed freely, and the participants stopped judging one another.

“I’m really grateful, Mr. Yungjong. Thank you for saving me.”

“No! It was nothing! Haha! I just did what I had to.”

Before Sungchul noticed, it seems like the two had gotten much closer than before. Sungchul noticed the vial of Divine Elixir of Escape that Yungjong had been discreetly fidgeting in his grasp. He smiled, amused, before shoving another piece of meat into his mouth.

‘They say the creature called man will willingly give a woman he loves his liver or his gallbladder.’

This is referring to the Korean mythology of the Nine-tailed Fox. It is an ancient fox that was given the chance to become human if it

eats X amount of human liver/gallbladder. It took on the ‘illusion’ of a beautiful woman in order to tempt men into giving up those organs.

His cooking skill was something Sungchul was smug about. Not that he was trying to brag, but a rare smile formed on his lips.

However, Sungchul suddenly noticed someone’s gaze from behind him. It was Ahram; he had avoided everyone after being punched by Yungjong, but he suddenly appeared on the final day before the rank match. He stared at the happily feasting Yungjong and Sunghae, before disappearing into the darkness again.

“Kim hyung! Is something wrong?”

The excited Yungjong called out to Sungchul. Sungchul calmly memorized the direction in which Ahram had disappeared to as Yungjong called him again.

“What’s wrong? Kim hyung.”

“Ahram came by and looked over you and Sunghae before leaving.”

“That bitch? Me? Why?”

“I don’t know why, but you better be careful.”

“Pfft. What can that kid do to me? Even Sunghae is strong enough to step all over him.”

Yungjong felt Sunghae’s gaze and exaggerated a bit. She laughed a bit and motioned for him to rejoin the feast.

He definitely wasn’t wrong. Over the last five days, Yungjong had become much stronger while Ahram simply stared blankly from the corner of the training center doing nothing. However, There was something that bothered Sungchul. He recalled the red-headed female mage with a freckled face in charge of Ahram. She had been rather skilled.

‘That woman couldn’t possibly be called out for revenge? No... that kind of thing...’

That kind of event was unthinkable. The Summoning Palace explicitly forbids anyone from touching the summoned physically without proper permission from the Palace. Strictly speaking, the existence of the preselected were also illegal, but that was easier to pull off because no mage directly used their strength on any of the summoned. To harm the summoned meant to challenge the authority of the Summoning Palace. They say there is a fine line between bending the rules and breaking it, but the consequences of the two offenses were vastly different.

There was no way that a mid-rank mage would give up their lives for another, but there were always exceptions... Or so Sungchul thought as he cautioned Yungjong.

“There is no reason not to be careful.”

“Pssh. You should also be careful, hyung. That brat doesn’t like either of us.

Yungjong smirked before returning to the feast. The joyous sounds of laughter rang out from the forsaken cathedral.

—

Clunk!

The iron gates of the Plaza opened with a suffocating dread. Hundreds of summoned watched quietly with hushed breaths as the monster slowly revealed its form through the massive gates.

“W... what is that?”

“Th-that’s crazy...”

It was a massive primate with crimson light emanating from its fur. The humans trembled before every one of them retreated from the dominating presence of the massive monster. The grotesque creature’s tire-sized eyes gazed across the humans standing around its feet. Their terrified faces filled its blue eyes.

“OOKIKIKI!”

The monster revealed its teeth with a wide smile and started to laugh.

Tam Tam.

The worst monster of Pacman rules had arrived at the Blanche Plaza.

Chapter 16 – Pacman Rule (4)

The same message appeared before everyone's eyes.

[Rank Matches will begin.]

[Tam Tam is an aggressive and savage monster.]

[Escape the Tam Tam's predation for an hour.]

[Victory conditions will also be achieved with Tam Tam's elimination; if achieved.]

"I don't see Mister Yungjong."

Sunghae began looking around the arena nervously.

"What happened? We promised to help each other..."

Sunghae let her words hang as she desperately looked for Yungjong. However, it wouldn't be easy looking for a person in the large plaza filled with a thousand people.

"Yungjong... Where are you?"

It most likely wasn't out of the goodness of her heart that she was now looking for him so desperately. Sungchul could remember the elixir that Yungjong had been fidgeting behind his back during his conversation with her. He might have made an irrational promise

with her as many men would do and chose to hide when it was time to deliver. It was a common story.

Sungchul chose to look away, towards the rest of the crowd positioning themselves in the arena rather than reply to her muttering. There was the factionless and Hakchul's faction on the right, positioned in a disorganised way, while Jungshik's faction stood in a diagonal line on the left. Jungshik's faction stood closer to Tam Tam, but he didn't immediately have his forces retreat.

The Preselected were also split into two forces. The ones with the divine elixir stood harmoniously in the corner to the right, but the ones without the elixir stood opposite Jungshik's faction, together with Sungchul. However, there was one thing that stood out. Ahram was within the right corner conversing loudly with people wearing a very satisfied expression on his face.

‘Why is that bastard over there?’

As he put the question aside, screaming broke out towards the front of the crowd. The Tam Tam began its hunt.

“Ookikiki!”

The Tam Tam used his two arms to propel himself forward, like a quadruped, towards the right side.

“Everyone run! Hurry!”

With Hakchul's shout, hundreds of people began to scatter like leaves in the wind. The Tam Tam's massive hand swept across the floor and grabbed three people at once.

“UWAAK! S-Save me!”

“KWAAAAK!”

The struggling captives quickly entered the open maw of the massive creature.

Squish! Crunch!

His massive teeth tenderized their flesh and blood into boluses of meat which then slithered down his throat and into his intestines.

“....”

Sunghae's whole body trembled in fear.

“W-what is that? Just what is that?”

It wasn't just her. The other preselected lost all will to fight against the oppressive force of the Tam Tam.

“Just run for now. There's no time to discuss this.”

Sungchul ran forward with all his strength as if to lead the charge, and hundreds of people behind him began to follow his lead because of their fear. Behind them, the massive monster busied itself with tossing people into its gullet.

The feast of an oppressive monster. This was the traditional scene of the Pacman rule rank match. On the other side of the plaza walls, various powers of the Other World were enjoying the grotesque slaughter, smiling from the packed seats.

“Blanche Plaza has no luck at all, to get Pacman rules on their second rank match; and with the Tam Tam at that.”

A middle-aged man holding blood-colored wine acknowledged the fully armored man who was surrounded by beautiful women.

“....”

The fully armored man's face contrasted the middle-aged man with the wine glass and looking completely stiff.

‘Fucking Summoning Plaza dogs. They're sucking us, the Order of the Iron Blood Knights, completely dry. Have we lost the support of the empire?’

The man was the Iron Blood Knight's Grand Knight, Ma Sanggil. He stood wordlessly, and walked towards the observation tower. Two knights closely followed behind him, like they were his shadow.

“Dolorence Winterer!”

Sanggil let out a roar as soon as the Observation Tower’s door opened. The collective gaze of all the mages in the tower gathered on Sanggil. A magician coyly walked over towards him within the silence. Unlike most magicians, she wore a tight dress which revealed her feminine charm. She was Dolorence Winterer. Her freckle-filled face greeted the incensed Grand Knight of the Blood Iron Knights with a smiling face.

“Were you looking for me?”

Sanggil glared at Dolorence with contempt and sternly asked her.

“How is the Captain’s son? I’ve read from your report that he hasn’t received the divine elixir in the first rank match.”

Dolorence looked to be surprisingly comfortable under Sanggil’s seething gaze.

“It has been taken care of.”

“Meaning what?”

Sanggil’s hand gripped his blade. His raging eyes emitted an undeniable murderous intent; creating a suffocating atmosphere for the magicians sitting within the Observation Tower with them.

“The captain’s son managed to get a hold of a Divine Elixir.”

“How can that be?”

Sanggil looked as though he didn’t believe it.

‘The Divine Elixir of Escape can only be obtained by the blessings of the ‘God of Order’ that presides over the Summoning Palace. It is only granted through the trials and can’t be reproduced with alchemy or magic of any kind. And this redheaded bitch still managed to get her hands on one?’

It sounded impossible. Sanggil believed as much and continued trying to drive her into a corner.

“I’m supposed to just take your word for it?”

Dolorence donned a smug smile and spoke in a cheerful tone.

“You’ll see, however, don’t blame me for how I managed to get it.”

“What does that mean?”

“I simply followed the Iron Blood Knight’s doctrine.”

“Speak plainly, mage.”

Sanggil finally pulled out his blade; Dolorence placed a scrying orb onto a nearby desk.

“ ‘Sacrifice the few for the sake of the many’; Isn’t that one of the Iron Blood Knight’s famous doctrines?”

Ahram’s appearance was held within the scrying orb. It closed in on his hands and the Divine Elixir held tightly within his grip.

—

“UWAAK!”

20 more died. The Tam Tam continued to loudly chew on the people and look around for more victims. The people were screaming madly in fear.

Among the crowd, it searched through those with long hair; It picked a woman from them. Men were muscular, making their meat tough, but women tasted better with their fatty meat. The Tam Tam wiped off his bloody mouth with his massive hand and reached out to his next victim.

“Kyaaaa!”

The next victim quickly flew into the Tam Tam’s mouth. It

continued looking for its next meal as it chewed.

“How long do we need to keep running for?”

Sunghae asked with ragged breath.

“Until the bastard is full.”

“When will it be full?”

“Around 30 people.”

There wasn't much time left until the starving beast would have its fill, in Sungchul's grip was the explosion scroll. The blade of retribution had to be held back until it lowered its guard.

“UWAAAK!”

That moment came unexpectedly quick as the beast shoved ten more people into its mouth. It leaned back in satisfaction and then burped.

“Buuuuurp!”

It was easy to ignore the sound, but now there was a disgusting stench which filled the arena. The Tam Tam scratched its head as it looked around with even more savagery in its eyes.

“Ooki?”

Now it was play time. The Tam Tam was an unusual creature that would also kill for sports, and it grabbed another pair of victims with its hands. It looked at the struggling humans with curiosity filling its eyes as it began smashing them together like a child playing with its toys.

“S-stop!”

“Uwek!”

The two people cried out desperately a few times before they became crushed into tenderized meat in Tam Tam’s hands.

“Oookikikiki!”

The Tam Tam laughed and bared its teeth as it sought out some more toys.

“Ookiki?”

It looked at a group of people that weren’t running away like the others. The Preselected.

“Shit. It’s looking at us.”

One of the preselected spoke hurriedly.

“Everyone be prepared.”

Yuhoon calmly took a step back and pulled out his Divine Elixir. The Tam Tam slowly moved towards the preselected.

“NOW!”

Yuhoon was the first to pop open the Divine Elixir and pour it over his head, with the rest of the group following his lead. The approaching Tam Tam hesitated and tilted its head in confusion.

“Ooki?”

It quickly lost interest, but there was one person that hadn’t used his elixir yet; that person was Ahram. He broke past the group of preselected and headed over towards Sungchul, having no fear of the monster.

“Over here! Here! You stupid monkey! Over here!”

“Ooki?”

The Tam Tam was quick to respond to the provocation, and Ahram became even louder and more animated.

“Rip this fucker apart! Do it now!”

The Tam Tam turned around and moved towards Ahram. At that moment, Ahram pulled out something which caught Sungchul’s eyes.

‘That... is the Divine Elixir of Escape. How did that bastard...’

The bottle’s shape looked extremely familiar; he dug through his memory before finding it: the image of a man and a woman sitting around a bonfire last night. An outspoken male, an experienced woman; the male nervously fidgeting with a small vial behind his back.

‘That must be Yungjong’s.’

Ahram fully displayed himself, before he poured Yungjong’s elixir over his body.

“Kyahahaha! Now, you stupid fucking monkey! Go and kill that fucker!”

The Tam Tam simply ran past Ahram who was now blessed by the elixir and roared out in anger rather than the curiosity of before.

“Ookikiki!”

“Yungjong.... Where did he go?”

Sunghae began looking for Yungjong again as another disaster approached. Sungchul spoke out resolutely in her direction.

“Yungjong is not coming, so do what we had discussed.”

Sungchul gripped his explosion scroll and headed to the front. He waited for the perfect moment while the frenzied creature continued stepping on people like they were ants. He opened the scroll and shouted out clearly after all the fearful people had fled far enough away from the creature.

“Explosion!”

The scroll became dyed in light and created a massive explosion beneath the creature’s feet.

BOOM!

The Tam Tam, who had been running about excitedly, suddenly lost its balance due to the force of the explosion and fell forwards.

“Kkeeeek!”

It was a great enough force to shake the entire plaza, but the Tam Tam was still not dead. It had only fallen over; all within

Sungchul's expectations.

“Now!”

Sungchul lifted his blade high and ran over to the unconscious monster.

“Ah... Where the fuck is Yungjong!”

Sunghae profaned in frustration and began using Moonlight to fire at its eyes, signaling the countless other summoned to also start attacking the fallen Tam Tam.

“Now! Bastards! It's time to get our payback from that fucking monkey!”

Jungshik and his subordinates stood at the front lines.

“Everyone! Now is the moment! Let's also go attack!”

Hakchul lifted his sword and tried to follow with the momentum, but only his closest allies bothered following him out of the 500 members.

Stab! Stab! Stab!

Dozens' of blades continued to stab at the unconscious beast, but

its tough hide and even tougher muscles didn't allow the average summoned to cause more than a few superficial wounds to it. The majority of critical damage was done by the preselected and Jungshik's faction. Their blades, unlike the average blade, could cut through its flesh and sever its muscles, causing it to twitch, but that was the limit to it. Sungchul also appeared to be doing a similar level of damage, but it was deceptively different.

“....”

Stab!

It looked as though he was simply plunging his blade halfway like the rest of crowd, but he also twisted the blade; causing the Tam Tam's tough muscles to wrap around it, inflicting much greater damage to the beast. Sungchul seemed to move more slowly, yet he alone was the one who destroyed the creature's left leg.

“Ookki!”

Every time Sungchul drove his blade into the creature, the Tam Tam would scream in agony. Every one of the attackers believed it was their own doing and attacked with even more vigor.

The fallen Tam Tam eventually regained its senses and opened its eyes. When Sunghae aimed for the eyes once again, it brought up its arms to protect its face as it stood up.

“Fuck! The Monster! It's still alive!”

“Everyone fall back!”

Everyone that had been excitedly stabbing the creature quickly fell in behind Jungshik’s faction.

The Tam Tam glared at everyone with an enraged expression and began beating its chest. That was the worst signal the Tam Tam made; it meant that it was about to go berserk. The infuriated and blood-soaked monster inspired tremendous fear, enough to make them feel as if their souls was being sucked right out of their bodies; except for Sungchul, who was looking over the monster pleasantly.

‘I’m sure I’ve completely torn out his leg muscles. I bet it can’t even stand for much longer than this.’

His attacks seemed quite normal, but he had worked towards disabling the creature’s movement.

“Now! Stick to it! Stick it to that fucking monkey until it dies!”

Jungshik and his subordinates rushed with the crowd at the monkey once more. The Tam Tam flailed its arms desperately in defense, but hundreds’ of shallow cuts gathered on its flesh until it eventually gave out.

[What a surprise!]

[You have felled the monster!]

[Beyond expectation, the trial was completed; regardless of results, top rewards are granted to the Blanche Plaza.]

[Congratulations! You have survived the second rank match!]

This was how the worst of trials was completed with the greatest of results, but Sungchul's objectives haven't been accomplished yet. He quietly kept his sight on a certain man who was celebrating happily; it was Ahram. Sungchul finally decided that it was time to act.

Chapter 17 – Pure Discipline (1)

[As the Tam Tam has been slain, a secondary reward based on contributions will be distributed.]

[The Summoning Palace’s Department of Operations is currently judging the contributions.]

The summoned lingered around the plaza for a considerable amount of time after the monster had fallen. They could hear violent sounds and quakes that could tilt the very world coming from over the tall plaza walls. It felt like an eternity had passed before another message appeared before their eyes.

“What... 0.2%? Only that much?”

“I’ve only got 0.1%?”

The majority of contributions among them hovered below the 1% threshold. The number that appeared before Sungchul, however, was the outlier.

[Your Contribution: 18.4%]

For an oppressive level of contribution, the rewards would be just as oppressive.

[You have been judged for S-tier rewards.]

Bonus Reward:

1x Scorpion-tail Whip

Standard Reward:

14x Palace Tokens

3x Fresh Meat

15x Apples

1x Week of Rations

Selection Rewards:

5x Divine Elixir of Escape

1x Potion of Berserk

1x Soldier's Crossbow

[Select One]

Among the choices, Sungchul chose the crossbow. The pile of items, including the crossbow and the whip, fell in front of Sungchul. He pocketed the most important reward: the Palace Tokens.

‘There are only two more rank matches left; I still require twenty-three Palace Tokens that I need to earn from them. This is gonna be close. I should just be able to make it.’

This match showed the maximum amount of tokens he could earn with Blanche Plaza in first place; Even with a spectacle like this, he obtained only 14 tokens. To earn something similar Blanche Plaza would have to remain in first place while performing a similarly impressive feat.

‘There is only the Death Match rule and the Free for All rule left. Free for All is going to be all or nothing, but I still have to keep Blanche Plaza in first place for the Death Match.’

This was the reason he had picked the crossbow. Explosion scrolls were ideal for taking down a large target, but for the death match, it was more critical to take down the important targets than anything else.

After he’d packed up his items, Sungchul looked through the Stone of Records. As expected, all of the results had been recorded within.

[1. Kim Sungchul – 18.4%]

[2. Ahmuge – 5.2%]

[3. Chun Jungshik – 4.3%]

...

[12. Bae Sunghae – 3.3%]

...

[782. Lee Yuhoon – 0%]

[783. Kim Taeksoo – 0%]

...

Sungchul was in first place. He could've argued that he had more than 80% of the contribution, but he guessed that the judges only attributed the explosion scroll's success in bringing the Tam Tam to its feet into his score. They couldn't account for how much damage he had actually done to the creature, nor had he even tried to aim for any of the vital spots. On the other hand, all of the preselected that had stood by with the divine elixir over their bodies now had 0% contribution.

He fell into contemplation as he looked at Ahram who was now spouting profanities with no trace of the excitement he had displayed during the match.

'It wasn't in my plans, but I did do something to get noticed. It's not very likely, as most people will just credit it to the item rather than to me... but I'm bound to get caught if I keep putting up a show like this.'

A difficult restriction attached itself to his plans. He now had to keep Blanche Plaza in first place while also avoiding being noticed. Sungchul slowly returned to the Preselected camp as the excitement of their victory simmered down. He decided to first approach Yuhoon.

“Where is Yungjong.”

“Yungjong? Well... where could he have gone? I was looking for him too.”

Yuhoon’s eyes slid over to Ahram on the opposite side of the camp. They were hiding something. If the ‘leader’ Yuhoon was acting like this, there was no point in asking them. He would need some bait.

Sungchul asked the same question, this time with a piece of meat and two apples in his hands, to a different group of preselected.

“Where did Yungjong go?”

They all clammed up, but their eyes were glued to the meat. They all had managed to get some Palace Tokens and rations due to Blanche Plaza being ranked in first, but the zero percenters couldn’t get their hands on a luxury item such as fresh meat. And now, the opportunity to taste meat had surprisingly arrived before them.

“Excuse me...”

An unknown man approached Sungchul discreetly.

“Will you give that to me in exchange for information?”

Sungchul offered the meat and apple first, after grabbing the meat the man started to speak in a hushed tone .

“Before the match, the Drill Sergeant pulled him aside. They’d left the palace gates together as I remember.”

“Do you know where they’d went?”

“That is all I know. Don’t ask me anything else, and don’t act like you know me.”

The preselected hugged the meat and fled from Sungchul. He must have thought that it would be a shame to leave behind a perfectly good apple as he ran back to grab the apple while avoiding Sungchul’s eyes and ran away once more.

‘The Drill Sergeant.’

Sungchul rose from his seat, left through the palace gates, and quickly found a clue. He could see the Homunculus’ distinct tracks which stood apart from the countless footprints on the trail. As the doors had been closed during the rank match, the chance of it fading away was slim. He followed its tracks through the forest and it soon led him to a very familiar building; the Forsaken Cathedral. This had been the first gathering place of the Preselected.

Sungchul soaked in the cathedral’s eerie presence and entered the building. He could see traces of a recent fire, and there was the faint scent of flames and meat lingering in the air. He slowly took

in his surroundings until he discovered something. There was a hand peeking out of a casket.

“...”

He quietly approached the casket and pulled it open. It contained an unrecognizable corpse which had been torn to shreds. He could only confirm the body's identity from its lower half.

‘Ha Yungjong.’

On the face, which looked closer to tenderized meat, Sungchul found a small tuft of hair.

‘Wolf’s fur.’

It was the work of a wolfman. Many possibilities flashed past his mind, but suddenly, he heard some noises that were coming from nearby.

“Ah. It’s so annoying cleaning up after humans!”

It was a familiar grating voice. The Drill Sergeant. He was entering the Cathedral with a smaller homunculus pushing a wheelbarrow.

“But, we can get lots of candy, so it’s alright! Even my child can eat some now!”

The Drill Sergeant held out a piece of candy for the smaller homunculus who happily ate it.

“It’s so delicious. Mama! One more please!”

A human’s shadow stood in front of the happy pair of homunculi.

“Eh? A familiar human is here. What are you doing here? Human?”

The Drill Sergeant looked towards the open casket.

“What did you see? Human?”

She revealed her razor-like teeth.

“Answer me, human! What did you see? You didn’t happen to see what’s inside there did you?”

“Did you bring this cart so that you could carry away the corpse?”

Sungchul spoke in a curt voice. The smaller homunculus standing beside the Drill Sergeant hopped up towards him and postured threateningly.

“How dare some human speak like this. How dare you talk back? Just because you’ve become a little stronger, you think...”

Sungchul grabbed the homunculus by the leg.

“Uh... Hey...?!”

The Homunculus that was lifted into the air looked around in confusion for a moment; before it crashed to the floor and turned into a bloody paste.

The Drill Sergeant’s eyes grew wide.

“You! You Bastard!!!”

The Drill Sergeant’s head twisted towards Sungchul like the seconds needle of a windup clock.

“H-how dare you kill my child... I may not have birthed him, but I still can’t forgive you; I will never forgive you. Even if you are a preselected, I can’t allow you to walk away after you’ve already seen that corpse... This Drill Sergeant will now gladly kill you!”

The Drill Sergeant took up a martial arts stance and jabbed towards him.

‘Jab Jab’

After a while, she began spinning her fists like a windmill. They say, ‘living in a temple for three years will allow one to read the poem of the moonlight breeze’, and it looked like living in the Summoning Palace for 20 years had also allowed her to learn a few fighting techniques.

“I’ll turn you into my slave and keep you stuck between the boundary of life and death!”

However, on this day, she’d picked a fight with the wrong opponent. His opponent was the strongest being known to all of humanity. Sungchul wasn’t someone that a homunculus could face even in a million years. There was a horrifying scream that soon filled the cathedral.

“Who killed Yungjong?”

Sungchul pulled out one of her fingers and crushed the wound with his thumb.

“UWAAAAAAAAA! Drill Sergeant doesn’t know this! Human! Please release me! I can forgive the killer of my... Eeeeng!”

He continued pulling out all of her fingers and continued with some pieces of her flesh.

“I’ll ask you again. Who killed Yungjong?”

The Drill Sergeant finally realized that the human standing

before her lacked any form of sympathy.

“Ahram... It was Park Ahram! Human! Spare me... Please...”

“Ahram? Someone like Ahram couldn’t possibly kill him.”

“No! Ahram is now a wolfman! Human! That redheaded mage turned Ahram into a wolfman!”

“So that’s how it is.”

The whole truth finally revealed itself. This explained how Ahram could kill Yungjong with his meager strength. Werewolves; they had abysmal future growth, but it was the best method to gain instantaneous strength.

‘They didn’t involve a magician directly and simply gave him the method. What a vile woman. Truly disgusting.’

Finally, he extorted the quest list from the Drill Sergeant, and she spat out the bright orb while trembling. He couldn’t help but feel disappointed.

‘It’s just the common quests. I guess that means even this bastard only amounts to so much.’

“Now... how about letting me go? Human? Sir? Please?”

Sungchul looked directly at the Drill Sergeant and raised her above his head, then spoke icily.

“Do you remember my face?”

“Of course I remember, human! You are the greatest and most merciful among all of the preselected!”

He started to slap her face with one hand.

Smash! Smash!

After the sounds of bones cracking and muscles tearing, the Drill Sergeant’s face was completely unrecognizable.

“You must have seen me 25 years ago.”

Her past desperately rushed through her as she heard these words until a face finally came out of her memories. The Drill Sergeant paled.

“C-could it be... you’re the world’s enemy?! How could that be... you died five years ago... to the human-dwarf coalition...”

“It must be a disappointment that I didn’t die. Also, it wasn’t they who couldn’t kill me, but rather, I who chose not to kill them.”

Sungchul grabbed the sack of candy that was bloated in her pocket and shoved it down her throat. Her razor-like teeth shattered as her esophagus was fully blocked. He dragged her across the cathedral floor as she struggled painfully then punched her a few times before tossing her deep into the forest.

“.....”

He turned away from the burning cathedral and pulled out a small whistle from his possessions. A small squirrel descended from the sky and sat on his shoulder.

“Kyu Kyu?”

It was Krill Regall’s Sky Squirrel.

– I want to know more about Dolorence Winterer.

He tied a small gem as well as the note to the squirrel, before patting its head. The Sky Squirrel deftly flew off into the night sky and disappeared from sight.

Chapter 18 – Pure Discipline (2)

There was a murderous aura surrounding the plaza, and it was coming from Jungshik's faction. He'd raised the topic regarding his dead subordinates on the day after the Tam Tam match. There were over 30 of his people that had been sacrificed during the Tam Tam match.

No one had expected Jungshik to create this kind of situation since Hakchul's faction had also received some damage although significantly less when compared with Jungshik's faction; Jungshik himself had led the charge, so it was only reasonable. After holding a funeral service for his men, he confronted Hakchul's faction with his group.

“I have something to say!”

He stabbed his bloody sword in front of Hakchul and growled at the people that were surrounding him.

“Starting today, we will be ruling this plaza.”

It was an explosive announcement. Hakchul was more than a bit surprised, but he still used all of his effort to keep it from showing on his face.

“I don't understand what you're saying? Why are you doing this?”

“You don’t know? It’s because you guys aren’t doing jack around here.”

Jungshik had realised that there were too many blatantly useless people in this place. And the situation hadn’t changed since the first rank match either. Those who fought, risked their lives, while the others simply sat back and watched; fully satisfied with just being spectators.

They couldn’t even muster up the minimum amount of courage needed to contribute, yet they always had something to say regarding the rewards that others got. And it wasn’t uncommon for them to resort to theft either.

“Drag them out.”

With Jungshik’s gesture, one of his subordinates dragged out two people whose hands were tied.

“Your people had the balls to covet my men’s stuff.”

Jungshik’s subordinate grabbed the back of their heads to reveal their faces. They had been beaten so badly that it was difficult to recognize their original appearance.

Hakchul’s face froze in shock, then grew red in anger.

“E-even still, how could you beat someone to this state before hearing them out?”

Hakchul raised his hand. Several lieutenants around him nodded their heads and snuck off to bring back a few dozen people; they surrounded Jungshik's faction through sheer numbers, but Jungshik didn't appear to be scared of them at all.

As though expecting such a development, he smiled widely and pulled out the bloody sword from the ground and spun it around dexterously. It spun wildly before its point aimed straight at Hakchul.

“You wanna have a go?”

The fuse had been lit. The tension grew to the point that a fight could break out at any moment. At this time, a man strode over arrogantly between Hakchul and Jungshik while whistling to himself. Several hundred pairs of eyes were aimed at him.

They first noticed his handsome appearance, tall height, and symmetrical body, but soon they felt an unusual aura coming from him. It wouldn't be a lie to say that he was arrogance incarnate.

“Let's not fight. Love and peace, you know? Isn't that right, [pretty lady](#)?”

Ahram is talking to the woman standing beside Jungshik.

Even under the gaze of the crowd, he didn't wilt, but rather, continued to jest as he approached both of the leaders.

“ ... ”

Sungchul watched the man's movements from a distance. The other preselected also took notice of the situation with great curiosity.

“Ahram? Why's he acting like that all of a sudden?”

“That's what I'm saying. He was all whiney about losing his staff... maybe he has finally lost it.”

The man walking fearlessly between Hakchul and Jungshik was none other than Ahram Park.

There were dozens of subordinates standing behind both leaders, but they couldn't think of stopping him as he strode in so naturally and with such blatant arrogance. Ahram eventually arrived in front of both the leaders.

“Why so serious? Hm? Should humans be fighting with each other even after winning the rank match?”

Ahram looked at Hakchul then at Jungshik as he spoke. Jungshik's cold glare pierced him like daggers. Ahram slightly opened his mouth in mock surprise, but that was all. He approached Jungshik, as though appeasing a child, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

“Woah woah~ Friend. Cool it, okay?”

Jungshik's shoulder moved slightly, and with great speed and accuracy, Ahram's clothes turned to tatters. If his blade had come any higher, it might have taken off his neck.

"I'm going to chop off your neck next time, so leave before I stop being nice."

Jungshik spoke frostily, and Ahram smiled in response.

"Che, this guy can't control his temper, can he?"

Something outrageous had followed his words. Everyone thought that Ahram had finally lost his marbles. Jungshik was one of the strongest within the Blanche Plaza that everyone recognized. No one knew where this arrogance had come from, other than Sungchul.

'He's aching to show off that ill-gotten power of his.'

Ahram's body suddenly changed. It twisted, then grew fur along his face and arms. Everyone watched this transformation in shock and horror, until a monster which was slightly larger than an adult man stood before them.

He was a werewolf. And like vampires, werewolves were one of the racial transformations that could be obtained voluntarily. It instantly granted 30 strength, dexterity, and vitality. And other than the critical weakness of the abysmal growth rate and inability

to learn magic, it was like being a wolf locked in a pen with the sheep being the recently summoned.

“Now, let’s cool our heads a bit. Mm?”

The transformed Ahram laughed loudly as he strode closer to Jungshik a step at a time. Jungshik quickly realized that the monster would be difficult for him to deal with, but it was still a moment too late. Ahram had already targeted him and also didn’t care to let him live.

“What? Nothing more to say? Did your temper fizzle after seeing my true form? Huh? Did that rage fix itself suddenly? Huh?”

He took another step forward with an endless stream of taunts. Jungshik’s subordinates stepped in between them with their blades drawn.

“Boss, We’ll try to slow him down.”

“Please escape!”

At that moment, Ahram took a step forward and his claws split the air cleaving through the two humans’ flesh as easily as through tofu. Blood and viscera splattered everywhere, and the two men hit the ground as corpses.

Jungshik’s group had suddenly become smaller.

Ahram sneered as he licked his bloody claws.

“Now that I look at you, there’s a lot of pretty pictures on your body. Is that a dragon? Huh? Why won’t you talk? Maybe you’ll feel like talking after I’ve drawn a few more pictures on you, isn’t that right?”

Ahram no longer held back his savagery, and as he revealed his strength, no one dared to step forward to stop him. Jungshik realized that he couldn’t face this opponent and felt his impending death, but suddenly Ahram came to a stop.

“What? Why?”

He began speaking to himself. He looked off into the distance and swung his hairy arms.

“No, what more reason do I need than that I want to kill him? I don’t know. Fuck, I said I don’t know!”

Sungchul suspected the redheaded mage had intervened behind the scenes.

‘Jungshik is a preselected summoned. I don’t know who chose him, but if Dolorence had to step in, it must be someone important.’

However, Ahram wasn't so easily handled.

“It's fine. I'm sure my dad will clean up the mess later. My faceless father, that is.”

The beastly Ahram's yellow pupils glowed with frenzy, and he swung his arms towards Jungshik. Jungshik succeeded in stopping the claws, but the force of the blow still carried through and crumpled his body off to the side.

“Che!”

He glared at the werewolf rushing over towards him as he bit his lips nervously.

“?!”

His legs wouldn't move. The blow must have damaged his legs. It might recover soon, but he would be defenseless against the next attack. He watched helplessly as the werewolf rushed towards him before a miracle occurred. Wolves appeared on both sides of Ahram. They tore up Ahram's legs as he pushed through the crowd to reach him.

“Fuck, what's this?”

They were Spirit Wolves. The same wolves that Ahram had shown during the first rank match. The two wolves now attacked their original master.

“These mutts!”

Ahram tore apart the wolves with his claws in a frenzy, and the wolves disappeared into the air with a pitiful cry.

“Who did it!!”

He sifted through the crowd of people with frenzied eyes.

“Who the fuck was it? The fucker who used my staff! Huh?!”

Ahram’s attention had shifted away from Jungshik, so his subordinates efficiently took his immobilized body away. However, the situation hadn’t quite resolved itself. Ahram’s temper had simply transferred from Jungshik towards the rest of the summoned.

“Which one of you fuckers was it?!”

Ahram blindly ran towards the crowd, and the horrified crowd scattered like leaves in their panic. Several dozens of people were trampled and an unlucky few were tenderized into meat by his claws. The plaza became chaotic.

Within that chaos, Ahram began to breathe heavily as he slowly turned back to his original form. His transformation unraveled, only lasting for 5 minutes. But within those 5 minutes, he had

changed the whole dynamic of power within the plaza.

Jungshik, who had been rising, had now been incapacitated and Hakchul could only watch in horror as the wolfman attacked his comrades. Ahram reveled in the tense atmosphere and looked around with a sneer. No one could stop him nor could they criticize him. He had absolute power over this arena. He left with a knowing grin, aware of what he had just obtained.

At this moment after everyone fell silent, Sungchul wasn't busy watching Ahram like the others, but rather, at a certain woman. She was the one who had secretly conjured the two spirit wolves, and hidden the staff behind her as she nonchalantly blended in with the crowd. It was that woman.

Sungchul recognized that woman's face.

‘It's her, without a doubt; the same one as before.’

She was the one who had been aiming for the bonus monster during the first rank match. He'd managed to gain on her, but she clearly was more capable than she let on. He had only been wary of her before this, but this was clearly a level of intuition and ability that couldn't be learned on the field. Her painstaking effort and countless encounters with death was subtly embedded in her every move. He had only suspected this before, but the critical timing of her discreet summoning, along with her supernatural evasion, had confirmed his suspicion.

‘That woman... I've known this from the start, but she's

definitely not an ordinary newbie.'

He had never seen it directly, but he'd heard some interesting rumors regarding the Summoning Palace. Gods, or those beings that were similar to gods, were endowed with the ability to traverse through time and enter the Summoning Palace as initiates. Reincarnates; those beings that returned with their past experiences in war intact. He recalled a forgotten memory because of that woman. There was a need to observe her further, yet there was something even more important that needed to be taken care of first.

A Sky Squirrel deftly landed on his shoulder.

"Kyu Kyu!"

Sungchul petted the squirrel's head then unraveled the pouch attached to its forearm to check its contents.

[Dolorence Winterer. Age 24. Frost Mage. Graduate of the Magic University of Airfruit. A hound for money and power with a rotten core, but her ability is also acknowledged as top grade by her peers.]

"Ho~ An Airfruit graduate. That's quite impressive."

Sungchul moved on to the next part of the letter with an amused

expression.

[She ignored everything to constantly observe her preselected, but there is a brief moment where she takes her eyes off of him. That is when he is dragging an innocent woman into the forest.]

A rare smile formed as he finished reading the letter.

Chapter 19 – Pure Discipline (3)

The opportunity arrived quickly. Ahram, who had already revealed his nature in front of everyone, had a much easier time hunting women now. He didn't even try to flatter them as he had done before, but a single phrase filled with mockery was enough.

“Do you want to know the secret to become a werewolf?”

Sungchul held himself back three times to be entirely sure. As the sun slowly began to set, a message from Krill Regall arrived on his shoulder.

[The time is now.]

It was a short message, at this moment Krill Regall was watching Dolorence Winterer leave her post while spouting profanities.

“The fucker is at it again. Disgusting fuck. I can't look at this filthy shit anymore. I thought the son of the Captain of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights would be more decent, but I couldn't be more wrong.”

When she stepped away, several rookie summoners followed up and tried to lift her mood.

“It is such a struggle. How did you get stuck with a guy like

that...”

“There are only 2 more rank matches left! There will be rewards at the end, no matter how degrading it might be.”

Honeyed words. No one would speak their mind of Dolorence being a despised person who stepped on the weak and groveled to the strong. Without proper backers, it wasn't even possible to learn any spells. Battering up to your superiors was a crucial skill.

“If I were in that plaza, I would have killed that bitch.”

She sipped some alcohol while being surrounded by her lackeys. Not a lot of it, but enough to wet her lips. It was something she often did when stress overtook her. However, she suddenly discovered Krill Regall who was lingering nearby.

“Hey, you. What are you still doing here?”

A cold smile formed on her lips.

“Oh...? Me?”

Krill froze in shock. Her sudden interest in him was surprising, but it was the scheme in play that amplified his fear.

“Yes. You. Did you end up finding your lost preselected?”

Total despair. The only ones who knew about this were Krill and Sanggil, and the news hadn't spread to the others yet.

“Yes. He's been found. He was just fine.”

Dolorence put on a mysterious smile and lightly shook her drink upon hearing the news.

“For real?”

Her eyes sparkled as she asked.

“Hm?”

Her snake-like eyes snared Krill in place.

“T-that is....”

She stared at him for a while before taking another glass to her lips, then spat in contempt.

“You know, I am rather friendly towards fresh faces, but I detest the rookies that just categorically suck up to people.”

“...”

“It's fine if you just want to leave after receiving a favor. Do that;

I won't stop you, but remember this: you might leave this place and never meet the Grand Knight of the Blood Iron Knights, but if you plan on living as a mage, you're bound to bump into me more than a few times.

She had taken the scenic route around the bush, but her demands were simple: I have something on you, now bribe me to keep it to myself. Krill could feel a cold sweat trailing down his spine. It was like a frog facing off against a snake.

As he slinked away, he couldn't help but sincerely wish for her destruction. The mysterious preselected's face popped up in his mind. Krill only knew that the man had a lot of jewels and a strange amount of strength for a summoned. He could think of many possibilities regarding the reason for it, but he decided not to pry into it any further. There was nothing good to be gained from this line of thinking. That man's actions did bother him though...

'Why did that man ask for information about Dolorence... Could it be he's trying to screw with her?... No way.'

Krill found himself enraptured by unreasonable expectations as he stared at the scarlet moon hanging high up in the sky.

“ ... ”

Another person was looking up at the same sky; a man with glistening eyes beneath his disheveled hair. Sungchul then solemnly observed the atrocity happening below him. Ahram the werewolf had finished eating the woman he had just fucked.

Sungchul passively watched the woman's quivering eyes lose their focus and let out a deep sigh. He jumped down towards this feral degenerate that had cut away his final link to his humanity.

“Ahram Park.”

The small, but clear voice stirred the forest's melancholy. The werewolf, a piece of chewed flesh still in his mouth, turned around. A look of surprise flashed across his blood-smeared face.

“Who is it?”

Ahram threw the corpse and stood up. The ravaged corpse fell between him and Sungchul who was standing two and a half meters away.

“I was looking for you. Is this what they mean when they say, ‘Have your cake and eat it too’?”

The aggressive questioning didn't phase Sungchul at all, rather, it only caused him to raise his gaze and looked directly into the eyes of the werewolf. Ahram, who had felt all-powerful until now, felt his breath catching and his legs buckling. His body couldn't move, it was as though he had been paralyzed.

‘W-what's wrong with my body?’

At first he thought that it might be a side effect from his transformation into a werewolf, but as time passed, he began to

realize the true cause; it was out of pure terror. The threat of danger coming from looking into Sungchul's eyes made his instincts scream out by impulse.

“Y-you bitch!”

He denied the terror reverberating within him and jumped towards Sungchul; then found himself suddenly spinning out of control. He stopped only after being embedded into the ground. The man that had turned his world upside down crushed something within his hand.

‘I-I lost? How did this happen...?! That red-head told me that being a werewolf will make me the strongest in the plaza...’

Dolorence's promise would have been the truth, if not for a certain hidden master hiding his strength.

“....”

Sungchul briefly looked around before breaking off a thick branch that was within his reach. It would serve as a decent switch. Ahram realized what he was doing, but it was already too late by now.

Wham! Wham! Wham! Wham!

Unending blows fell on the werewolf's skin as if he was beating out dust from a rug. Ahram's hide began splitting as his blood and

flesh splattered everywhere. He shrieked in pain, desperately wishing for someone to save him.

‘Redhead! Save me! Save me! Fuck it! Save me!’

However, his guardian was outside her room, surrounded by her yes-men, busy sipping alcohol.

As the senseless beating ended, Ahram finally returned to his human form. His body was covered with bloody bruises which triggered an emergency alarm, to which his guardian didn’t respond to. His eyes, covered with tears and snot, reflected the image of the man who was holding a large club. He finally realized the full extent of the situation, and pitifully bowed his head to try and beg for his life.

“P-please... Don’t kill me...”

[Drop]

Sungchul let the stick fall, and a small bit of hope blossomed inside of Ahram. However, Sungchul simply stomped on him instead.

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!

Sungchul had simply switched from beating to trampling. He deliberately stomped on the face, breaking all of Ahram’s teeth.

“Uwuuugh!”

Ahram could no longer stand the pain and fell over onto his back. And Sungchul simply watched.

After some time had passed, Ahram began to beg for his life once again.

“P-please... I’ll do anything, please spare my life.”

At this moment, Sungchul pointed at a spot within the forest. There lied the corpse of the woman whom Ahram had just killed. Her unfocused eyes gazing eerily towards Ahram.

“What did you do when that woman begged for her life?”

“T-that is...!”

Sungchul slowly drew closer, and Ahram screamed as an unspeakable horror filled him.

“Don’t come closer! Y-you... if you touch me... you won’t get away with it!”

“Me? Die?”

Sungchul let out a laugh filled with ridicule.

“D-do you know who my father is? He’s the captain of the Iron Blood Knights. The Iron Blood Knights’ Captain!”

“The Captain of the Iron Blood Knights?”

“T-that’s right! I don’t really know him, but in this world, I’ve heard that he’s very powerful... That’s right, a strong backer! A backer! You might not even be alright if you kill me!”

“Is that so? How did you become his son if you had just been summoned into this world?”

“I-I don’t know. Fuck... Some reincarnate or something like that came to me one day and told me! Told me that I was that guy’s son! He said I would be like some rich kid if I came over to this world!”

“A reincarnate...”

It wasn’t something that interested him, but a question had been answered. He finally knew how someone like Ahram had become a preselected.

‘They used a reincarnate. I suppose someone like Sungtek might know someone who was capable of becoming a reincarnate. But even if the world was ending, how could he bring a fucker like this kid here?’

The Captain of the Iron Blood Knights, Sungtek, had three children in Otherworld, however like all of the other children, they had died before reaching the age of ten. It was probably the Palace's idea to bring someone like Ahram, who might not even really be his son; because his qualities were so sorely lacking.

Sungchul lifted the stick once more.

“P-please...! Are you doing this because of Yungjong? That wasn't my fault. He was the first...”

Ahram crawled away pitifully.

“...”

Sungchul suddenly grabbed some vines from nearby and strung Ahram upside down from his feet.

“I'll tell you one thing. This is Otherworld. It isn't always the case, but strength rules all here. It's just that kind of place. It would be troublesome if you got excited because you became a little bit stronger. Why? That's because there might always be one or two people who are stronger than you.”

“I-I understand... I get what you're saying. I'm sorry. I'm telling you, I'm really sorry!”

“And one more thing. There is no probation around here. One mistake and you’re done for.”

The stick rose into the air and struck Ahram’s jaw before he could even utter a scream.

“Beasts will be attracted by the scent of your blood. Be thankful that the law of the jungle also accepts human garbage like you.”

Sungchul dropped the stick and whispered quietly.

“Welcome to Otherworld.”

As soon as the words left his lips, smaller monsters began to appear within the forest. They licked their lips at the sight of fresh blood pouring out of Ahram. He struggled desperately in his final throes, but his fate had already been decided.

“....”

Sungchul quietly headed out of the forest, but before he could get far, a vague apparition appeared before him; leaving him slightly surprised.

‘It’s rare that I miss something.’

A woman appeared amidst the darkness. It was a woman covering her face with a hood and holding a familiar staff in her

hands. Once Sungchul silently acknowledged her presence, she removed her hood to reveal her face. A strange glint flashed across his eyes as he recognized the face.

‘This woman.’

They had already met several times. They had competed for the bonus monster, and she had stopped Ahram as he was busy rampaging. This nameless woman spun her spirit wolf staff and opened her mouth.

“I was going to take care of him, but looks like someone got ahead of me.”

“ ... ”

Sungchul silently acknowledged the approaching woman.

“You must be something more than just an average newbie, seeing as you could take care of a werewolf without breaking a sweat.”

Sungchul looked as though he was simply listening to her speak, but he was actually using his heightened abilities to uncover her identity. There wasn't anything that stood out for him. Even the Eye of Truth, one of his Soul Contracts, couldn't reveal anything special about her. She was a newbie summoned that appeared to be normal, yet she wasn't normal. His previous suspicions were only growing stronger.

‘She must be a reincarnate.’

The woman in question sighed.

“Such a solemn person, maybe you have a bad impression of me.”

“Tell me what you want.”

Sungchul finally broke the silence and spoke. A brief look of surprise passed over the woman’s face after he did, but lasted only briefly before she continued to speak, her eyes firmly fixed on him.

“I’ll be brief, so as to avoid any misunderstandings. I saw you kill that perverted bastard and thought you weren’t such a bad person, I also guessed that you might not be an average summoned either.”

Her voice was brief but intelligent. Her gaze didn’t falter during the conversation, and it sounded fluid as though she was reading from a script.

“You also don’t seem to be average”

“Correct, I won’t tell you anything. But, I also won’t expect any information from you.”

The mystery woman held out her hand towards him. It was a woman’s hand that was starting to harden with callouses.

“I am Ahmuge. You must have seen my name on the Record Stone.”

She was the figure that had dominated first place during the rank matches beyond the preselected. That figure’s identity was such a slim woman.

“I have reasons why I have to leave the Summoning Palace with a good score, but it will also be difficult for me to get the special rewards by myself. So I also want another skilled person beside me. Not some privileged brat, but someone with real ability.”

“Is that why you recruited Jungshik?”

Ahmuge smiled at his pointed question.

“He’s a talented person. And he also has a good leadership ability.”

“Why did you step in to kill Ahram then? You knew that he’s a werewolf, right? He would have been a strong addition to your combat strength.”

She firmly shook her head.

“That person would only harm the cohesion of the group. There might be something gained from it, but there would be even more

to lose. If you hadn't taken care of him, I would have done so."

Hearing these words, Sungchul smiled. Their thoughts were in agreement. Sungchul might have killed Ahram due to his despicable acts, but he had also done so because his presence was proving to be an obstacle. Sungchul had never strayed from his objective since arriving at the Palace.

"Ok. I'll join you, but I have a condition."

"Don't pick something too outrageous."

Ahmuge said with a smile.

"Don't worry. It doesn't even stand on its own. Rather than that, I want to know if you know any hidden quests. Especially ones that raise magic power."

"Magic power... Ok. I know of one."

Ahmuge held out her hand once again and grabbed his.

"What is your name?"

"It's Sungchul Kim."

"Sungchul Kim...?!"

Ahmuge's voice and face changed.

"Is there a problem?"

She looked into his face directly before shaking her head.

"No, nothing in particular."

"Good, then let's get out of here. There will be some guests arriving here soon."

They stepped out of the forest as the beasts began to feast upon Ahram's corpse which was hanging upside down on a tree. Dolorence arrived at the scene only after a considerable amount of time had passed. After slaughtering the beasts, she stared at Ahram's mangled face.

"T-this fucking bitch...!"

She began to scream like a crazed banshee while pulling at her hair. The various creatures within the forest couldn't approach the fuming aura of a frenzied mage. Some time passed before she once again coldly considered Ahram's corpse. There was one place that had remained a bit intact, it was his face. Her mind hit upon a spark of brilliance then started hatching a scheme. That spark eventually took form in a plan that might just be able to rescue her from this disaster.

“I can’t let it end like this. Not after all I’ve done to get to this position. After all the groveling I’ve had to endure...”

A chilling smile formed on her lips.

It was an unremarkable morning. The summoned ate their meals and trained for another day and through the fog, the sun could be seen rising from the horizon.

After his meal, Sungchul returned to the preselected camp to earn his magic power and intuition from his common quests. However, there was something unusual within the camp.

“Why is that guy like that?”

“Don’t get close... his condition doesn’t look so good.”

Several preselected were either fearful or annoyed while staring at a certain someone from a distance.

Sungchul walked through the crowd to see who the person was.

“....”

Wrinkles formed upon his forehead.

“Uuuhhhh.....”

It was Ahram's corpse.

“Uuuuhhh...!!”

His corpse, with a hood covering everything except his face, sat while moving from side-to-side like some kind of hobo.

‘They made this brain-dead doll with necromancy. It must have taken some effort to add in the preserving magic to stop his decay.’

Nothing about it felt right, and such a bad feeling usually had a high likelihood of leading to misfortune.

Krill Regall urgently sent a letter with the following message.

[Dolorence Winterer has finally lost it! She's going to kill everyone in Blanche Plaza!]

Chapter 20 – Inextinguishable Fire (1)

“You. Come help me.”

Krill hadn't imagined that the embers would fly over towards him. The sole fact that they had graduated from the same Magic Academy drew Dolorence to approach him. He had welcomed it at first, but she completely ignored his requests for help while still blatantly asking him for favors as fellow alumni.

He had no choice in the matter until she was discredited due to her failure. His only escape was if he reported Ahram's death to Sanggil; but, to ensure her safety, Dolorence had dispatched several magicians in the area between the Observation Tower and where Sanggil resided. Acting too conspicuous would only result in his death. But... it wasn't like there were no other ways at all.

Once a week, Sanggil liked to check in on the Observation Tower to receive his report before each rank match. He then often 'requested' bribes from Krill as he received his report, but this now proved to be the best opportunity for Krill. The only problem was that the next rank match was in four days. And he would have to obey Dolorence for that time.

“You'll come to the Azure Plaza with me.”

He really had no choice. No one wanted to find out what would happen if she was refused or ever driven into a corner. Krill followed her through the Slave Hunter-only passage to the Azure Plaza. Dolorence put on a hood and shoved a deeply crimson blood

vial into his hand.

“Keep this. It’s precious so you shouldn’t spill any of it.”

“W-what is this? [Sunbae](#).”

Korean word for upperclassmen/Senpai

“What do you think it is? It’s activated Lycan blood of course. It only contains the ability to change an average person into a werewolf when it’s activated.”

“Is that so...?”

“They don’t teach you this stuff at school, so you need to remember it. I’ll teach you the method to activate Lycan blood later when I have time.”

Was this for her or him? The previously cold and distant Dolorence was now acting quite friendly. Krill felt nauseous enough to vomit on sight, but another thought also came to his mind as well. The thirst for knowledge, which was something that all magicians possessed drove the desire in him to want and obtain the information possessed by a mid-rank mage. But then he recalled all the grievances buried in his heart and managed to calm himself.

Dolorence discreetly approached a nameless summoned within the Azure Plaza. She passed on the blood vial then put him under hypnosis.

“On the day of the rank match, you and your friends will kill everyone in Blanche Plaza. I’ll show you the people you have to target first.”

Krill caught on to her scheme while peeking at her from the side.

‘She wants to avoid responsibility by causing an artificial ‘[Act of God](#)’ like in the Tam Tam match, by killing all of the preselected. The responsibility would then naturally fall onto Sanggil or someone of a higher rank, and it would only keep tumbling down until being categorized as failure to coordinate with the Summoning Palace.’

Referring to the unique situation caused by Sungchul during the Tam Tam match where they actually killed it instead of dying.

He had to admit, she was very brazen in her actions and abilities. He began to think that there might be much to learn from this woman if he shadowed her.

Krill met a familiar face upon returning to the Observation Tower. It was the Slave Hunter with his missing arm. The Slave Hunter noticed Dolorence standing in front of Krill and walked up to him.

“Are you with that woman?”

Krill wanted to ignore him, but it was difficult as he had helped him in a time of need.

“It seems that way.”

“There’s nothin’ more dangerous than a woman who puts average folks like us through ordeals.”

He let out a lonely laugh as he disappeared into the darkness. And Krill’s mood plummeted even further.

—

[Creation of 6 Werewolves in group D of Azure Plaza. Werewolves are expected to target preselected.]

The information brought by the Sky Squirrel caused an upset in Sungchul’s head. A single werewolf had stirred up the Blanche Plaza so much that it was obvious what would happen if there were six of them. It would be a one-sided slaughter.

“Mmm....”

He had fought in countless battles, but he didn’t have any clever plans for solving this situation. It would have been different if he had more time, but with only 4 days to prepare, it would be impossible to strengthen the summoned in time.

It was possible to ‘coincidentally’ kill one werewolf, but all his efforts would be wasted if he had to kill all six. He needed a conclusive solution to this problem. Thinking on this, his mind squeezed out a single person.

‘There was that.’

Sungchul brought out a large book that had been shut away in his soul storage. It was the talking book, Bertelgia. She wasn’t very reliable, but several memories of the alchemist Eckheart were recorded memories within her. There might be something inside of her that would be able to get him out of this situation.

“Why did you call me?”

She spoke with a yawn. It bothered him that a book would even bother yawning, but he didn’t say anything about that and made his request with a solemn voice.

“The next rank match turns out to have 6 werewolves. I need alchemic aid for dealing with the werewolves with my current forces.”

“Werewolves? Someone that can take care of daddy’s golems is calling me for something weak like werewolves?”

Bertelgia acted indignantly and closed herself before falling to the floor.

“For the sake of a greater objective, I have to hide my strength. I need something that an average summoned can use to kill the werewolves.”

“Mmm. So you had circumstances like that, did you?”

“Can you do it?”

“Of course. I’m Bertelgia. I am the culmination of Alchemy. It might not be bad to show off a bit of my ability given this opportunity.”

Bertelgia with her pages fluttering flew up into the air then circled around Sungchul. She let out a soft shout before revealing one of her pages to him.

[Inextinguishable Fire]

“What is this?”

Sungchul asked.

“As the name says, it’s an inextinguishable fire. It’ll only grow stronger with water, and it’ll be effective against werewolves who are weak against it. Best of all, there are plenty of ingredients that can be found around this area and are also easy to make.

“Hoh.”

Even though he thought the book talked a bit too much, she had still very efficiently taken care of his requests.

He scanned at the listed ingredients for inextinguishable fire: Golden Toadstool, Alchemic Charcoal, and 3 large Blood Pudding oozes. Other than the alchemic charcoal which had to be synthesized, the other ingredients could all be acquired through foraging or hunting. It required an oven, and a mortar and pestle, but that wasn't an issue.

“You still have daddy's portable alchemic cauldron, right? You didn't throw it away, right?”

“I didn't toss it.”

“Good. Let's look for golden toadstools first. You can find them near the cliff edge.”

Bertelgia fluttered excitedly as she flew ahead. Sungchul grabbed her from behind and closed her.

“Hey, what are you doing? I was going to finally enjoy some scenery!”

As Bertelgia struggled with all her might, he started to move. He

moved at such an unimaginable speed that even Bertelgia, who had been shouting, lost her words in her shock.

“W-who are you? Really? What did you eat to get so fast?”

While she watched dumbstruck, he had already arrived at the bottom of a cliff.

“Where is the golden toadstool?”

“Mm... such a strange person. I got stuck with a really weird person. What am I supposed to...”

“I asked where the golden toadstool was.”

“Such a boring and rude person. I really don’t have any luck at all.”

“Golden...”

“Ok! I’ll find it for you! It’s over here.”

Bertelgia flew up to the edge and hovered over a small cluster of rocks sticking out from the cliff.

“This. This is a golden toadstool.”

“Mmm? That is a golden toadstool? It looks like a bunch of stones to me.”

“Try Observing it.”

Sungchul leaped up to the cliff and grabbed the gold ore.

‘Mm. This is not a rock.’

Rather than a rock, it was much closer to a moss or a mushroom. Besides the rock-like exterior, there were several golden spores and powder within. It would be easy to mistake this for actual gold at first glance. He felt amazed as he put his nose close to smell it. An information window then appeared in front of Sungchul.

[Golden Toadstool]

Level: 2

Grade: D

Attribute: Wood

Effect: Ingredient

Note: It is named as an ore, but in reality, it is a mushroom. It catches fire easily and creates a strong blaze, so it is often used by dwarves as fuel. It forms a fungal colony, and its quality grows based on the size of the colony.

“Hoh.”

Amazement appeared in Sungchul’s eyes. It was fascinating. How long had it been since he felt the joy of learning something new?

“Next is Blood Pudding. Their ooze doesn’t light on fire easily, but once it does, it won’t extinguish easily either! This is the alpha and omega of the inextinguishable flame!”

Bertelgia hurried him to the next step. He put away the Golden Toadstool into his pocket and carried her to the next location. It wasn’t difficult to find Blood Puddings. They crawled out like hyenas once they smelled blood inside their caves.

“Be careful. Blood Puddings are slime-type creatures, so they are highly resistant to physical damage. You might be strong, but it’ll get dangerous if they surround...”

She couldn’t quite finish her sentence because a Blood Pudding popped and splattered everywhere.

“W-what... you... who are you!”

Bertelgia froze in mid-air. Sungchul ignored her and pulled out a sack then gathered the Blood Pudding ooze inside.

“How do I make alchemic charcoal?”

“W-who are you... really...”

She must have been really shaken this time, and her shock wasn't so surprising either. It was known to be physically impossible to kill a slime-type creature with just a fist.

‘What kind of person is this? What is his identity?!’

She finally realized that her master was truly not a normal person, and also without any form of empathy.

“Alchemic...”

“Ok! I'll tell you!”

The ingredients were easily found in the area. All it took was a mixture of leaves and timber that could be synthesized into alchemic charcoal. It took quite some time, but when the alchemic charcoal was completed, he pulled out Eckheart's portable cauldron from his soul storage.

“Now, everything is ready. All we have to do now is to create it.”

Sungchul nodded, then stood in front of the cauldron. The fire, fueled by the alchemic charcoal and Golden Toadstool was burning into quite the blaze.

Chapter 21 – Inextinguishable Fire (2)

Boom!

A small explosion occurred inside the cauldron. Sungchul took in the fungal smoke then blankly read the message which appeared before him.

[Synthesis Failed!]

“Shit!”

This was already his third attempt. His gaze naturally moved over to Bertelgia who was floating near the cauldron.

“Bertelgia.”

“Hm?”

“How did this happen?”

“What do you mean, ‘how did this happen’?”

She replied obtusely and opened up one of her pages before Sungchul.

“You’re failing because you didn’t read the book properly and only glanced over the ingredients before you started.”

“ ... ”

He didn’t have anything to say because she was speaking the truth.

“Now, slowly read the page again. Starting from how much of each ingredient to add and followed by reading the instructions. Don’t just eyeball it.”

“I didn’t eyeball it...”

Sungchul had pride in his status as a top-class chef. He calmed his heart, then looked over the pages displayed by Bertelgia more seriously. His gaze gaining a more solemn light.

‘Now that I’ve read it again, it does read like a cookbook.’

Other than the final product, cooking and alchemy were mostly of a similar process. Sungchul entirely focused all of his attention.

Bertelgia, seeing his changed attitude, muttered a few words.

“Well, maybe he has some talent.”

After some time had passed a blue light softly began to gather around the cauldron, and the ingredients within turned into a single product. It had become a dark and congealed liquid.

[Synthesis Complete!]

Sungchul released a breath of relief, finally rewarded after putting in so much effort.

[Inextinguishable Fire]

Level: 2

Grade: D

Attribute: Fire

Type: Ingredient / Consumable

Effect: Flammable Substance. Water excites the flames.

This time it had been properly created. Sungchul gathered some dry branches to try out the inextinguishable flames.

“You’re not trying to test it, are you?”

He nodded at Bertelgia’s question.

“Hmm. It won’t be easy to manage the flames. Dig a pit before setting it on fire. If you’re unlucky, you might just burn down the whole forest.”

Despite her warning, He took one of the alchemic charcoal that was blazing underneath the cauldron with his hands, then held it towards the pile of tinder.

Whoosh!

Fueled by the Inextinguishable Fire, the small ember burned fiercely.

‘It is a very controlled burn. I think this has some practical use.’

The soft smoke blocking his vision gradually became thicker. There were a lot of problems still left to solve, but discovering a possible solution let Sungchul feel much better about the whole situation.

“Hey? What are you going to do with that?”

The inextinguishable fire burned fiercely. It looked as though, at the rate it was going, it would soon burn down the entire mountain.

“...”

Sungchul stood in front of the flickering flames and looked at it with passive eyes.

“What are you doing now?”

He suddenly punched towards the fire. An unbelievable amount of force was carried by the punch which caused the flames to flicker weakly.

“Hiiii...”

Between Bertelgia’s fearful gasps, he threw out a couple more punches and uneventfully extinguished the inextinguishable fire; then after the fire went out, he grabbed Bertelgia.

“W-what are you doing?”

Bertelgia asked as she fluttered in panic.

“I’m finished, so I’m packing everything up.”

“Finished? What do you mean finished? I still have as much knowledge as there is sand on the beach! Can’t you just leave me be? The storage is dark and humid. I don’t like it.”

“You stand out too much.”

“What if I just stay inconspicuous?”

“You’re too big, and you fly.”

“How dare you talk about a woman’s size, so cruel.”

“Well, miss. Would you mind going into the storage now?”

“I-I can become smaller! I don’t have to fly either.”

She shined bright then became palm-sized as if to prove her words.

“Good?”

Her pitch grew higher relative to her reduced size.

Sungchul looked at the reduced Bertelgia for a bit before nodding.

“That size seems fine.”

He put her inside the military jacket that he was wearing. She seemed to be a perfect fit for the pocket, as though she had adjusted herself to its size, but a bit still peeked out slightly after she had settled. She spoke out quickly after seeing Sungchul glance

over at her.

“I want to see some scenery.”

He didn't deny her to that degree but instead fell deep into thought.

‘I made the weapon, but now I need to find a way to pour it onto the wolfmen.’

Werewolves couldn't use magic, but they did have a bestial instinct. It was so advanced that they could even dodge arrows coming from four different directions. They also had significantly higher dexterity than the average person, so it would be difficult to even land a drop of this liquid onto them with a half-baked plan.

“What are you thinking so deeply about?”

Bertelgia, who had been quiet in the pocket, popped out with a question.

“I'm trying to think of how to get the inextinguishable fire onto the wolfmen.”

“Daddy often used a dragon-headed tube and sprayed it like it was breathing fire, or he tossed out some pottery with a trigger.”

“But that's too slow. They wouldn't fall for something like that

unless they're stupid.”

“It’s just a matter of making them fall for it then.”

After listening to her thoughts, an idea flickered in Sungchul’s head. Krill’s message and Ahram’s living corpse. Both events seemed to be unrelated, but their timing was too opportune to call them a coincidence.

‘So that’s it. Dolorence Winterer is actually trying to eliminate the preselected. Among them, Ahram must be her number one target.’

The werewolves will have to target Ahram. They would also have to tear apart the corpse completely so that it was unrecognizable. That was the only way Dolorence would escape any fault. Sungchul decided to target these facts in his plan.

—

“ ‘Ey, Mr. whatchurname. What do you have for me this time?’

Jungshik looked deflated from the incident with Ahram, but he was still a figure who had a large influence within the Blanche Plaza. The overflowing confidence and sharp aura, however, had withered. He moved his camp to the corner farthest away from the preselected and the number of guards also seemed to have increased.

“I have to talk to you about the next rank match.”

Sungchul briefly summarized what was going to occur for the next rank match. It would be a death match style with human vs human combat, and the score would be based on the number of kills, etc. He omitted the part about werewolves making their appearance in the match though.

“Hoh~ News sure travels fast. How did you get this information?”

“I can’t tell you that, but if you cooperate with me, I’m more than willing to share it with you each time.”

“Cooperate...”

A mischievous smile formed on Jungshik’s lips.

“Well, let’s leave it at that then. What did you want from me?”

Sungchul requested to organize Jungshik’s forces during the rank match. He wanted Jungshik’s people to stay behind until ordered.

“Hoh~ You’re concerned about us? Or maybe you’re more concerned about how much points we would earn?”

“If you only care about the points, you’re welcome to ignore what

I have to say.”

Sungchul left Jungshik with these words. He knew it would be pointless to waste more words arguing after already having said everything that needed to be said. He was also confident that Jungshik would listen to him. Jungshik had already gained from his previous advice, and he was feeling cautious after his losses. Jungshik was also more clever than he looked. Every loss from Jungshik’s faction risked Hakchul regaining his control over the plaza.

‘I think we can prevent major losses on our side from the werewolves with this.’

He had prepared a relatively sharp blade. All he had to do now was to prepare a shield to defend against the enemy’s blade which was several times sharper than his. Sungchul observed Ahram who was sitting outside of the training center and looking out with a blank stare.

“Uuu..... Uuu....!!”

The hooded Ahram clacked his teeth while swinging his body from side to side like a roly-poly. Everyone continued to avoid him as he looked to be unwell and was continuously making unsettling noises. Sungchul made his way to the preselected faction across from Ahram and sought out Yuhoon.

“You wanted to speak with me?”

He pretended to be polite, but his face and attitude clearly displayed that he didn't want to deal with Sungchul. He couldn't say when it had started, but Yuhoon had gotten a bad impression of Sungchul.

Sungchul realized this after the second rank match had finished. He had gathered up the ostracized preselected and gotten high scores. Inversely, the other preselected who had Divine Elixirs had become undesirables. The leadership of the two had naturally been compared, which eventually got to Yuhoon.

“I'll be brief because I need to start training.”

Sungchul acted naturally as if none of these insignificant squabbles bothered him. He spoke his prepared words calmly.

“I came to share some hot information, fresh from my mage.”

“What information is that?”

Yuhoon had been cautious around Sungchul, but hearing that it was from a mage relaxed his guard. Sungchul looked around and spoke in a hushed voice.

“It is not confirmed, but I've heard that in the next match there will be people who're targeting us specifically among the opposition.”

“Targeting us?”

“It looks like they are enemies of the people taking care of us. The mage said that the people taking care of us would take a big hit if they kill us. In the end, it’s all rumors but...”

“So what do you want?”

“I want us, the preselected, to organize ourselves at the rear.”

The enemies weren’t just the werewolves. There were as many people with the werewolves as there are people within the Blanche Plaza. It was also convenient to separate the average summoned from the werewolves to enact his plan. This was why he had approached Yuhoon to talk about how they would dispatch, but Yuhoon only looked at him coldly.

“I think that might be difficult.”

Yuhoon was overwhelmed with negative influences from his opportunistic nature and other tedious feelings like envy that were controlling him. He stared at Sungchul unblinking and with a mocking chipper voice he said,

“I have to achieve a good score during this rank match no matter what. You might be able to take it easy after getting the top score in the last match, but my friends standing behind me and I don’t have that luxury. We have to make it up this match. My comrades and I will be standing at the front lines.

“Is that so? You might die?”

“Is that a threat?”

Yuhoon frowned and bared his teeth. It was an intimidating face without a trace of the amiability he always carried. Sungchul had assessed him accurately during their first encounter.

‘Is this Yuhoon’s true face? Truly pitiful. Staking so much pride on such a small amount of authority.’

Sungchul decided there was no more cooperation to be gained from Yuhoon, then spoke again.

“Well... if you insist, then I won’t press you anymore. I can only ask the others directly.”

“I wonder how many people will listen to you.”

“At the very least, I’ll be taking Ahram with me.”

Upon hearing his last words, Yuhoon finally let loose his guard and broke out in laughter.

“Take him. If you can, that is.”

Sungchul smiled widely and headed over towards Ahram.

“Hey, Ahram! Let’s go!”

Ahram, who had been swinging back and forth, turned and bared his teeth at Sungchul when he approached.

“KAAAAA!”

Between his clothing, the grotesque arm of a werewolf began to appear. Self-preservation. It was the only thought specifically placed within the corpse of Ahram.

“Let’s go, boy! It’s time for your meds!”

Sungchul relaxedly supported Ahram and began walking forward. Strangers might have thought it was just someone supporting a sick person. Yuhoon and the other preselected whispered quietly, wondering since when have the two of them gotten so close with one another, none knew the truth.

“....”

A living corpse had no need for organs. Sungchul looked over at Ahram, whose empty internal cavity had been filled with Inextinguishable Fire, then wrapped Ahram’s body with a cloak and left.

“Uuuu....”

Ahram, finding himself alone again, once more began to swing his body from side to side.

The preparations had been completed.

Chapter 22 – Inextinguishable Fire (3)

[Third Rank Match will begin.]

[Rule: Death Match]

[Kill the Summoned from the other Plazas.]

[There is no good or evil here; only life and death. Do not hesitate to cut down your enemies; there is no place here for people who cannot take another's life.]

People from the other Plazas could be seen as the door in the center of the Palace opened. There were approximately 700 people. There were relatively the same number of people in the Blanche Plaza. This might be one of the reasons people referred to Death Match as one of the worst rulesets. It was physically challenging to cut down a monster, but only by becoming a monster could one cut down another person. A message appeared in front of the hesitant summoned.

[There will be a penalty game for anyone who hasn't scored a single kill until the end, this penalty game has a survival rate of 2.4%. You have been warned.]

[Furthermore, there will also be a reward honoring the one with the highest score, so give it your all.]

It was a cruel set of reward and punishment. There was no better way to dominate a large group of people than the carrot-and-stick approach.

The summoned already understood the way of the Palace. There would be rewards and progress waiting for those who overcame danger, but those who cower would forever be left behind and continue their bare existence until eventually dying. There were many summoned who were prepared to make up for their past mistakes and bet it all on this match. It was for this purpose that nearly half of the summoned stood along the front of the plaza. Most of them were Hakchul and his people.

“It is heartbreaking, but we must get a good score in this match to recover our strength.”

Hakchul personally stood in the frontlines and made his speech with an awkward voice. Most of the people were listening halfheartedly.

Yuhoon’s group of preselected also stood at the frontlines and prepared for the battle.

“Don’t be nervous. There aren’t many out there that are stronger than us. We can flee from those who are stronger than us or we can outnumber them. Remember this: whether you kill someone strong or weak, they are worth one point.”

Yuhoon put forth some common sense in a comforting voice. Most of the preselected didn’t really respond to his speech, but they all resolved to score well in this match in one way or another.

‘Kill those who are weaker than us.’

The threshold for maximum rewards for the Death Match was set at 5 points. The sword-wielding preselected gripped their weapons tighter.

On the other hand, Jungshik's faction stood far to the rear, away from the battle.

“There is no need to rush. Those trash at the front won't be able to get much anyways. They'll just be our meat shields. We'll go in when the meat shields have tired themselves out.”

There was great unrest in his heart despite his confident words.

‘Will it really turn out the way he said it would?’

With wary eyes Jungshik observed Sungchul who was standing at the rear with him. Sungchul stood together with a few people, they were surrounding Ahram who clearly looked unwell. He couldn't figure out what Sungchul was up to, but they were both situated in the rear. This meant Sungchul was confident in his suggestion and was taking the same risk as he was. Jungshik comforted himself with these words while waiting for the rank match to begin.

“....”

Sungchul stared off into the sky with an expressionless face. It was a clear day, not a single cloud could be seen in the sky. The

sun, burning brightly, formed short but dark shadows and the soft breeze from the mountains felt cool and pleasant.

“Ah... I feel so nervous. Where could Yungjong have gone?”

Sunghae, caught in past traumas, began to mutter to herself. She had chosen to stand with Sungchul rather than with Yuhoon. It wasn't out of some 'woman's intuition', but rather, out of a forced obligation. It was well known that her staff was once Sungchul's and they had also acted together before. There were many within the preselected who held the same assumptions as Ahram had: That she was a pathetic woman who had slept with Sungchul to get his staff.

The two other men that were standing with Sungchul; Jungshik Park and Woojung Kim, had joined Sungchul out of their own free will. They had gotten acquainted because they both coincidentally were used car salesman and both disliked Yuhoon. They also benefited from Sungchul previously, and thus they had chosen to stick with him. However, they were reluctant at the sight of Ahram's cloaked body that was swinging in front of them.

“Pro Kim, you sure that guy will be alright like that?”

For reasons unknown, the used car salesman duo had decided to call him Pro Kim.

“Doesn't matter.”

Sungchul spoke bluntly and looked over the entire plaza with indifferent eyes. He couldn't find the person that he was looking for. Ahmuge; that suspected reincarnate. They had shaken hands with the idea of later cooperating, but she had hidden right before the rank match had started.

‘Intriguing. There is someone that can hide even from my eyes.’

Some people were known to have ‘thin shadows’. This meant that they had such a small presence, that they were often overlooked. Ahmuge was also one of these people, but in her case, it was more like her shadow didn't exist at all. She'd not only managed to evade his supernaturally honed senses, but also managed to slip beneath his guard and surprise him.

‘Could she have some hidden ability?’

Although it was commonly known that reincarnates normally return with the memories of their previous lives, there might also be some secrets which Sungchul was still unaware of. This was especially so in Otherworld which was filled with both mystery and wonder.

The sound of a homunculus blowing a horn sounded from a distance. Sungchul immediately returned to his group and shared some equipment with his comrades.

“Jungshik P, I'll give you this shield. Protect Ahram with it.”

Jungshik Park had a small stature, but he had spunk. His strength and vitality were among the highest in the group. He had a trauma related to corpses so hadn't been able to display his true strength in the first rank match. Other than his nasty habit of smelling his anus with his finger, he was actually quite a good addition to his forces.

When he received the Light Shield of Vitality, he scratched beneath his butt and tilted his head.

“Protect that guy? That guy; He seems a bit off his rockers, but isn't he still the strongest one here?”

“I think he's afflicted with some kind of side effect from the wolfman transformation. It will be enough to protect him just until he can transform. I'll give you the signal, you just have to protect him until then.”

“I got it. I suppose Pro Kim knows best.”

Jungshik P nodded his head and looked at Ahram with a difficult expression.

Next, Sungchul handed Woojung the Soldier's Crossbow.

“The same to you too. Protect Ahram with this.”

Contrary to Jungshik Park, Woojung had a large stature and a threatening aura, but his personality was introverted, and he

didn't have the confidence for close quarter combat. He had almost died of anxiety during the Tam Tam match. He happened to have been a special forces sniper during his military years and had no problem with him doing the attack one-sidedly. He would more than able to pull his weight during the battle.

“Oh hey~ This is too much. What will Pro Kim be fighting with?”

Sungchul revealed his beginner blade at Woojung's question.

“Ah... I see...”

Sunghae had already received a weapon from Sungchul. It was the magic staff, Moonlight. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that it was the most effective weapon within the Summoning Palace. Sungchul decided to not give Sunghae any particular orders because she would never be able to overcome her hatred for Ahram.

“...”

Sungchul, who had finished laying out his orders, looked to the front. The barrier between the Blanche and the Azure plaza was slowly dissipating.

[The Battle will now begin.]

[Please please show us a fight befitting of veteran survivors.]

The barrier disappeared, and hundreds of battles broke out between the palace gates of the plazas. As they were inexperienced with combat, they were needlessly disordered and cautious. Both sides moved like the tide with neither side willing to commit to the battle. They both instinctively knew that if even a drop of blood were spilled, there would be no turning back from there.

“This is why I don’t like Death Match style. I really can’t stand to watch this. Fucking pussies.”

The influential people within the Observation Towers watching the rank match began to grow impatient and spoke harshly. In this world, cowards were considered more lowly than criminals were.

Dolorence wore a glamorously adorned robe that she normally didn’t wear, and was socializing among the influencers like a butterfly. One of them complained as they watched the bloodless plaza.

“Ah! I can’t stand to watch this! I heard the Blanche plaza killed the Tam Tam and had high expectations to see some monsters, but they’re all just fucking expendable peasants. At this rate, someone will have to go and ruthlessly cull them down.”

Dolorence wore a thin smile and matched the mood with a sensual voice.

“How about we make a bet with the Azure Plaza then? They’re not as good as the Scarlet Plaza, but Azure Plaza is backed by pretty

powerful forces. They might have prepared something special after hearing about the news with the Tam Tam.”

“Mmm... Azure Plaza, eh...?”

As the man contemplated, Dolorence moved over to the window looking over the entirety of the plaza and checked her pocket watch

‘It’s almost show time.’

A cruel smile formed on Dolorence’s lips as something unexpected happened within the Azure Plaza’s side.

“Uu...!”

“Kuuu....!!!”

The people standing at the frontline suddenly collapsed and began to moan as though they were having seizures. Not just one, but six people began to convulse as though it had all been planned beforehand. All eyes from both plazas, after having nothing better to do, gathered upon this scene.

“What... what’s wrong with them?”

All of the Azure Plaza mostly looked confused at the sudden scene, but the Blanche Plaza was different. They had already

witnessed something similar. Their terrible premonition suddenly became a nightmarish reality.

“KWAAAAA!”

Their joints became twisted all over, and fur began growing all over their bodies. Their large eyes were dyed yellow, and their canine teeth filled their gaping maw. Werewolves. The terrible nightmare once again faced the Blanche Plaza and filled them with despair.

“W-WOLF MEN!”

People began fiercely pushing back towards the Blanche Plaza.

“Grrr....”

The six werewolves bared their fangs and stepped forward. The Blanche Plaza had already gone as far back as they could and began to completely fracture in response to the pressure. The people in the front continued to push the ones behind them. And as everyone continued pushing one another, the Blanche Plaza completely unraveled before they could even start fighting.

“Hey, Mr. Yuhoon! What do we do now?”

The preselected who had placed their trust in Yuhoon and stood at the front now looked towards him in despair.

“Let’s first calm down and escape to the sides. I’ll open us a path!”

Yuhoon grit his teeth and began using all his strength to push away everyone that was blocking his way.

“What the fuck are you doing! You bitch!”

As someone dared to speak up about his aggressive behaviour, he swung his blade without batting an eye. Blood splattered, and a man died. Yuhoon’s true devilish nature revealed itself as people turned to him in surprise.

“Fuck off! I said, fuck off! You wanna die? Huh, do you?”

People opened a path for this man whose eyes darted from side to side as he intimidatingly swung about his bloody blade. Cruel fate still headed his way despite his efforts to avoid it.

“I-it’s coming this way!”

“It’s coming!!!”

The werewolves ignored the crowds of people and headed directly towards Yuhoon and his group. Yuhoon weakly sat down as he realized the 12 eyes, filled with bloodlust, only had them in their sights.

“How...”

A single man’s face appeared in his mind. The man with a mysterious identity. The man whose thoughts he couldn’t decipher. His outer appearance might have been shabby and his looks laughable, but he had been telling the truth. He didn’t know whether that man had been lucky or something, but...

‘I should’ve listened to that bastard.’

Those were his last thoughts as a werewolf ran him through with its claw, and a set of ravenous teeth came from behind to tear apart his flesh.

“Oh. Fuck!”

Sunghae who was watching the scene from a distance couldn’t help but spit out profanity. It was just that much of a pitiful scene for the preselected. Within a moment, the werewolves had made rags out of the preselected and moved on to their next target.

[Main Target]

There was something marked within the werewolves’ sights. It was the remaining group of preselected off in the distance, and it was locating the location of the target that had to be killed first.

“Krrrng...!”

The six werewolves tore apart people between themselves and split the Blanch Plaza forces in half as they darted off towards the rear. They were headed towards Sungchul.

“Pro Kim! Pro Kim!”

Jungshik Park, holding his shield, repeatedly shouted out with a nervous voice.

“What’s wrong, Jungshik?”

“I... My heart feels like it shrank a size, can I run away now?”

“Hold it. You’ll calm down once you take a whiff of your butt.”

Saying that, Sungchul held his blade and stood to the left as if to protect Jungshik.

“Now, let’s hold it a bit longer. Once Ahram wakes up, he’ll kill all those low-grade werewolves for us. We’ll just sit to the back and eat some rice cakes.”

Jungshik Park felt comforted for some unknown reason. He felt so comfortable that it felt as if he could never be killed if Sungchul was at his side. Even in his wildest dreams, he would never

imagine that the person standing next to him was the strongest human, scratch that, swordsman in all of this world.

“Fire!”

Sungchul swung his sword and shouted. Woojung and Sunghae fired off one after the other in coordination towards the werewolves.

“Krrrrr!”

However, werewolves were still werewolves. They avoided the projectiles flying at them from the distance with ease. And quickly arrived in front of Jungshik Park’s shield by dodging all the flying arrows and energy bolts.

“Krrr!”

One of the werewolves swiped at the shield wall. Jungshik Park felt like he would fly off like a ball, but he narrowly kept his feet on the ground and held back the attack. Sungchul swung his blade and cut the werewolf’s body after successfully blocking its attack. The werewolf deftly retreated to dodge his blade, then growled with his teeth bared.

“Krrrrr!”

This time, two werewolves stepped up. The rest of them slowly spread out and surrounded the shield wall. If not for the constant

barrage of fire from Woojung and Sunghae, they would have attacked much more readily.

“It’s time.”

As Jungshik’s terror reached its peak, Sungchul grabbed his collar and pulled him back while he tossed something towards the werewolves with his other hand. The blackened liquid was Ahram’s rotten blood.

With the scent of the blood scattered in the air, the werewolves were once again reminded of Dolorence’s objective; Ahram Park. The existence which was behind the shield wall now stood exposed to them with no obstacles in their way.

Ahram continued to swing back and forth up until the werewolves tore him to shreds. They tore him up so completely that not a single identifiable piece of him remained.

At that moment, they didn’t notice that Sungchul had covered their bodies with inextinguishable fire. Sanggil, who had been watching within the Observation Tower, was filled with terror while Dolorence had a smile filled with pride. Sungchul, his expression passive as always, suddenly appeared behind Woojung.

“Stand still.”

He quickly covered Woojung’s bolt with a cloth and used the golden toadstool and alchemic charcoal to set it on fire. It was now

a single flaming bolt.

“Fire.”

Woojung pulled the trigger with his finger, the flaming arrow flew towards the werewolf that was tearing into Ahram's corpse. The werewolves agilely dodged the arrow, but when the arrow hit the floor, they couldn't stop the fire from spreading onto their bodies.

“Awooooooo!!”

The werewolves were burned alive by the Inextinguishable Fire. First, their skin and fur, then even their eyeballs. Black smoke rose into the sky.

“Wow~ Look at him~”

Jungshik C who had been watching from the rear now led his subordinates as though he had just been waiting for a signal.

“Let's go! Let's go kill everything!”

The landscape of the battlefield had changed. The moment the werewolves who had brought so much morale to the Azure Plaza were burned alive, was the moment the Blanche Plaza's victory was more or less assured.

Chapter 23 – Ahmuge (1)

One night, everyone experienced the same dream as God's curse swept through the land. From that moment on, not even a single child's laughter could be heard. The Curse of Extinction; This calamity was interpreted as one of the harbingers of the End. It brought an incurable illness that killed every child. It didn't discriminate between the rich or poor, strong or weak, noble or otherwise, and killed everyone impartially as all were equal in the face of unrelenting death.

“So, is the kid doing well?”

Captain of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights, Sungtek Cho.

Leader of what used to be the ‘Strongest Order in the Continent’, and currently one of the three most powerful individuals in the Northern Regions, he had lost every single child born in this world to the curse of Extinction. The offspring that had been left behind in the Real World was now his final hope.

The reports which made its way to him claimed that the son, who bore his mother's name, was doing quite well. With his natural leadership, he had led by example and displayed remarkable bravery to his people in the rank matches. He had even managed to strike down the Tam Tam that was usually known as the nightmare of rank matches. When he heard that the son that came from another world, from whom he never really had hoped much, was doing so well, he couldn't help but devote his attention to him.

“... Your son is doing quite well. The other side managed to prepare six werewolves for the rank match this time, but he managed to overcome them with a clever strategy. Haha, who would have thought of it? To use the alchemist class for this.”

Sanggil reported from the other side of a scrying orb.

“Is that right? For them to release six werewolves... Who’s backing the other side that’s using such scummy methods?”

Sungtek’s brow shot up. There was a limited opportunity for a person to obtain the Lycan race within the Summoning Palace. That meant that it would be impossible for not just one, but six transformations to occur.

Sanggil began speaking again, with a meeker voice.

“That is... it’s the Black Legion.”

“Black Legion? You’re saying this is Shamal’s doing?”

Sungtek’s half-white brow shot up. Sanggil felt like he was swimming against sewage.

“T-that is... not verified. We are just speculating at this point.”

“Yea? I mean it’s one thing if William did it, but Shamal would never do something like this. I’ll go talk to Shamal personally.”

“I-it’s not verified yet... I don’t think there’s a reason to bother anyone.”

“No, didn’t you say that Ahram was a great kid? I might not have raised him, but he’s still my blood. I can stoop my head this much if it’s for a prize like that.”

Sungtek waved his arms as he sat back in his chair. The brightly lit scrying orb slowly faded.

“Ah... fuck...”

On the other side of the scrying orb, Grand Knight Sanggil wiped the sweat from his forehead and collapsed onto his chair. A fiery-haired female mage revealed herself from the shadows from behind him.

“Sir Grand Knight, don’t concern yourself so much. It has already gone this far; we’re in the same boat now.”

Sanggil almost lost all of his preselected in the previous match. Even Ahram, who he had to protect no matter what, was not an exception to this. He had been driven into a corner, and Dolorence had slithered in front of him like a viper.

“I gave a false report as you told me to for now. Now... what should we do? Dolorence Winterer?”

Sanggil brushed his hands across his face in his anguish and spoke in a pained voice.

“It’s not that there aren’t any solutions; Sir Grand Knight. Don’t we still have a card left to play?”

“What is it? What is this card you speak of?”

Sanggil desperately raised his head and stared pleadingly into her eyes. She paused for a beat before answering.

“If my guess is correct, the Knight Captain doesn’t know his son’s face. I haven’t seen Sungtek back here since I’ve arrived.”

“I told him vaguely how the boy looks.”

“What did you tell him?”

“That he’s good looking and quite handsome...”

Hearing his words, Dolorence broke into a mischievous smile.

“Then that settles it.”

“What’s settled?”

“Have someone substitute for him. Someone similar. All parents

think their children are the most handsome anyways. Don't they say that even ogres think their babies are cute?"

"...Are you for real? Have a stand-in? It'll all be over once the Captain and the replacement meet."

A small portion of Sanggil's suppressed rage peeked out.

"Who says we'll let them meet? Just kill the stand-in, and it'll be ok. Have you forgotten that the next rank match is the last one?"

"Kill him... at the rank match? The stand-in...?"

With great difficulty, Sanggil's dense mind began to catch up to her vision for the narrative. She smiled a sympathetic smile and continued with her story.

"We'll make him a hero. A hero that fought alone against overwhelming odds and died alone. Understand that it is the Scarlet Plaza that is coming up next."

"Scarlet Plaza... You mean the very Scarlet Plaza that is being handled by the Assassin Guild?"

"Yes. Luck is on our side."

Sanggil finally understood the entirety of her plan. He swallowed deeply and spoke in a hushed voice.

“War would erupt between the Order of the Iron Blood Knights and the Assassin’s Guild after this.”

“That could be. But, is a war as important as Sir Grand Knight’s life?”

Sanggil suddenly glared at her blunt question, but he couldn’t reprimand her. In the eyes of Krill, who was watching from a distance, Sanggil seemed completely constricted by the snake that was Dolorence.

‘So great, Dolorence Sunbae... I doubted you, but to even manage to toy with the proud Grand Knight... Great... Truly great...!!’

After she had finished making Sanggil yield, Dolorence approached Krill and spoke to him in a relatively friendly tone.

“Did you see all that? Underclassman? For nameless people like us to spread our name as mages, we can’t stop at anything. We have to use everything at our disposal.”

“Amazing. Really... Amazing. Sunbae.”

Krill genuinely bowed to Dolorence. He couldn’t help but do so. Her opponent was someone who was one of the top 10 most influential members, Grand Knight Sanggil Ma. He was someone that Dolorence would usually never dare speak to. Not just anyone could ignore this stark difference and include them into their

treacherous scheme through the sheer force of their will.

‘If I could learn under this person... maybe even my degrading life could... maybe it could open up...!’

The ill-will he had held towards her at first had been resolved for the moment. Krill voluntarily poured Dolorence some alcohol. She smirked, then wet her lips with the strong alcohol before lightly licking it off with her tongue. She looked around the observatory before speaking quietly.

“I need a stand-in. Ideally, try to find me a preselected or someone that stands out for the job. I would normally have sent the Drill Sergeant, but for some reason, I can’t seem to reach him.

Dolorence looked down at Krill.

“Hurry back.”

The memory of a person that he had briefly forgotten popped up. The shabby appearance of a wild-looking man that looked ragged.

‘That person. I wonder who he is.’

The man was no longer an essential existence as Sanggil no longer requested for bribes. In contrast, this man was now a liability as he knew Krill’s weakness, just like Dolorence knew of Sanggil’s.

“Ah. One more thing.”

Dolorence called out as Krill was about to leave.

“Yes, Sunbae?”

“There’s someone that’s been getting on my nerves.”

“Who’s bothering you?”

“There is a woman who picked up the staff I gave to Ahram. It bothers me more that I don’t know her name. It bothers me a lot.”

Dolorence threw her shot glass towards the ground. Krill could hear her slithering voice as the glass shattered into pieces.

“You want to work under me, right?”

His heart froze at her words. His breath caught in his throat.

“If you want to learn under me, then prove your worth.”

“My w-worth? How...?”

“I don’t like it. You are trying to act naive when you already

know the answer.”

Her smile disappeared. It was as she'd said. Krill already knew what she was asking him for.

—

The fierce battle had ended. The survivors digested that the long and tiring rank match had ended as they looked at the message that appeared before them. Sungchul stared into the air as he wiped the blood off his blade.

[The Third rank match has ended.]

[Blanche Plaza has killed 452 people.]

[Blanche Plaza had 242 casualties.]

[You are ranked in First Place among the 4 Plazas]

His desired goal had been accomplished. He waited for the next message to appear.

[Overall rewards are adjusted by the rankings.]

[You have killed 7 people (Outside your Rank).]

[Your Contribution is 9.2%.]

[You have been rated for S grade rewards.]

Basic Rewards:

1. 12x Palace Tokens
2. 1x Bottle of Wine
3. 1x Week of Rations

Selective Rewards:

1. Brass Breastplate
2. Knight's Gauntlet
3. 2x Healing Potion
4. Warrior Class Transfer Scroll

Please Select Two.

They were adequate rewards. The appearance of Warrior Class Transfer Scrolls signaled that the final days of the Summoning Palace was drawing close. Sungchul chose the Brass Breastplate and the 2 healing potions. The Knight's Gauntlet would be more effective than the two items he'd chosen if they were used properly, but he chose to prioritize ease of use. In any case, they were all useless to him.

He'd taken care of seven people during this rank match. It was two more than the bare minimum for an A-grade reward. It was incomparable to Jungshik and Ahmuge, who sat at the top with over 30 kills, but he'd managed to reach S-grade with his

contributions. Everyone who participated in killing the werewolves had received S-grade rankings. Woojung was also acknowledged as having personally killed a werewolf and got the coveted SS rank. So Sungchul had nothing to complain about.

It was the best results he could hope for. He didn't stand out, yet had done just enough to reach his goal to earn a large amount of Palace Tokens.

‘I managed to get a hold of 37 Tokens. There isn't much more to go.’

The daily common quests would also come to an end. They would get him 8 Palace Tokens, and if he managed to reach mid-rank during the next rank match, he would be able to get enough Palace Tokens for his goal of the Echo Mage class.

“Hello.”

Ahmuge approached him after the battle had ended. He felt her properly this time, but she was a woman with a weak presence; It was difficult to notice her without needing to concentrate first.

“Why are you looking at me like that?”

The number of summoned she had managed to kill was 64. She scored the top score among all of the summoned. She utilized both her innate sword skills combined with her spirit wolf staff to aggressively raise her kill score and left Jungshik behind by 10

points to claim the top score.

“Why did you come find me?”

She replied softly with a mysterious smile at his question.

“I came to keep our promise from a while back.”

“The hidden quest relating to Magic Power?”

“Yes. I’m sure it’ll be to your liking.”

He could raise his magic power to his desired amount with common quests within the Summoning Plaza, but if he considered the future, he also needed to do more than that. He would need a considerably larger amount of Magic Power to contend with the Demon Lord Hethnius.

Sungchul was prepared to use every opportunity he could find.

“Ok. Lead the way.”

Ahmuge led him beyond the palace walls and deep into the forest. It looked as though she had visited the place more than once. As the woods were overgrown with no clear signs, it would be very easy to get lost in here.

“Do you perhaps have the Alchemist class?”

Ahmuge asked as she brushed past the trees.

“Didn’t we agree not to ask about each other?”

“Of course, but it left quite an impression on me. I never imagined that an alchemist class’s ability, the one they call a trap class, could be used to resolve that disaster.”

“....”

Sungchul didn’t answer. Ahmuge saw his thick face and her eyes curled up in laughter.

“To tell you the truth, I was prepared to give you a regular hidden quest but, seeing your prowess; I became determined. I have a debt to repay to you, so I prepared a top tier quest.”

There was a small pond at the end of the forest, at its center was the statue of a bowing angel. Ahmuge spoke while pointing towards the statue.

“The quest will begin when you touch that statue. You’ll earn rewards based on the difficulty you choose. However, be careful. If the difficulty you chose is too high, you’ll die no matter how strong you are.”

“Is that so?”

Sungchul looked back at Ahmuge and headed towards the statue. She sat at the edge of the pond and spoke brightly.

“I’ll give you 3 hours. If you don’t come out by then, I’ll assume you’re dead. Come back by yourself if you manage to survive past that time.”

“....”

Sungchul wordlessly walked towards the statue.

The moment he put his hands on the statue of the bowing angel, bright letters appeared before him.

[The Forgotten Path of the Seven Heroes – Sajators.]

“Sajators?”

A strange light appeared before Sungchul’s eyes.

Chapter 24 – Ahmuge (2)

After the message had appeared, Sungchul was moved to another space. It was a land without any features like trees, hills, valleys, or buildings. This perfectly flat land extended all the way to the horizon, which was the only means to distinguish the boundary of the land. Another message appeared before him.

[You have arrived at the Forgotten Path of Sajators.]

Sajators. He, along with Vestiare, was one of the two magicians that were a part of the Seven Heroes, but his style was vastly different to her's. Vestiare used echoes to cast her magic repeatedly, but Sajators was versatile enough with his ability to use several different types of magic simultaneously. Because of that he had earned the nickname 'Magician of Multicast'.

He would simultaneously prepare a multitude of spells, either dodging the enemy attacks or having already sealed off their movement with magic, before simultaneously unleashing the prepared array of destructive spells to destroy all of his enemies in one go. His Multicast was even able to stack several different high-level spells with enough power to blow away the mountains; even just obtaining a single one of these spells would greatly help Sungchul.

'I got lucky. I managed to find the path of Sajators after the path of Vestiare.'

He had hoped to also find traces of the other members of the Seven Heroes around the Summoning Palace. Since they always acted together ever since their conception until their final journey.

“Uuu.... I can’t breathe... so painful...”

Bertelgia, who was in his front pocket, began to struggle.

“What’s wrong, book.”

“I can’t breathe... this space... it feels like I am fish out of water. Hurry... into the storage... put me into your storage.”

It appeared that this space wasn’t suitable for familiars. He put the familiar into his storage, and not long after a light that was about the size of a firefly appeared.

It was a primitive spirit called Will o’ Wisp. The Will o’ Wisp which had arrived quietly began to form words.

[Which path of the Seven Heroes do you wish to walk?]
[The difficult of the trials will vary based on the dream.]

There were five different dreams listed in ascending order of difficulty.

[Gentle Slope]

[Flat Path]

[Gentle Hill]

[Twisting Slopes and Hills]

[Unexplored Path]

Sungchul chose the most difficult path, and countless clouds appeared from the horizon. The clouds quickly covered the sky, and grass rapidly grew to cover the land.

He watched the changing environment with cold eyes until something within the scene caught his attention.

‘Ah, this place. Isn’t this the Path of Lamentation?’

There was no doubt. This was the path leading to the entrance of the Demon realm. As if to prove that demons hated and despised all life, grass would not grow where a demon’s hooves had trampled on the Path of Lamentation. Only the cold, emotionless rain wet this dead land.

Sungchul watched the flowing clouds before picking a direction. He was heading north-west, walking wordlessly across the desolate landscape. Until suddenly and without warning, the ground beneath his feet gave out and pulled him into a vortex of earth and sand. It was a Sand Hell; one of the monsters of the demon realm. Sajators’s message popped up before him.

[Due to this monster that swallowed the ground, we lost a large number of support units and beasts of burden that were carrying our rations.]

Sungchul didn't panic and immediately jumped into action, he followed the contour of the sand as he ran towards the center of the vortex where a large pair of jaws awaited him.

“Ahahaha!”

He could hear the soulless laughter of a woman coming from the center. He grabbed the saw-like horns from its gaping maw to withstand the flowing sand.

“Ahahaha!”

The Sand Hell suddenly began struggling more violently and loosened the ground even further. Several tons of sand flew up then came showering down from the sky. It was an astounding amount of strength. However, Sungchul didn't budge.

He grabbed the Sand Hell's horn and held on solidly until its movements became dull. He twisted off the horn and stuck it deep into the maw of the Sand Hell after it had stopped shaking the earth.

“Ahahaha... Graaaaarkk!”

The Sand Hell spat out violet blood as it convulsed before it flipped over. Sungchul lightly leaped out of the sand pit and hurried on.

A human skeleton blocked his path next. He wore a brilliant crown and a shining set of armor. As if to prove his former regality, the skeleton warrior had donned equipment that was fit for a king; his body made clacking sounds as he drew his blade. A message appeared before Sungchul.

[A foolish king joined hands with the Demon King in exchange for eternal life. He got his wish, but he didn't retain his past form. We lost many friends due to this foolish king that stood in our way.]

Sungchul finally understood. The scenery before him was composed of Sajators's memories. He was perfectly reliving Sajators's journey through the demon realm that was sealed inside this place.

“Mortals... cannot pass...!!”

Several thousand skeleton warriors rose up around the Skeleton King. It was the very definition of a skeleton army. The crowned skeleton swung his blade, and the thousands of skeleton warriors mindlessly rushed towards Sungchul.

Sungchul cut down one or two skeleton warriors with his beginner's blade, but he ended up pulling out Fal Garaz from his storage.

WHAM!

One hammer blow crushed dozens of skeleton warriors and left them sprawled on the floor.

Wham! Wham!

Several holes formed within the Skeletal army. The army had the ability to replenish their numbers, but the rate of their replenishment couldn't keep up with the rate at which Sungchul destroyed them. Sungchul eventually reached the crowned skeleton and then finished the battle with a single swing. The crown fell to the floor and the army cursed with immortality disappeared, sucked into the ground through a mysterious force.

Several more obstacles blocked his path towards the demon realm, but he overcame them with little difficulty. Balrog, a high-tier demon, finally appeared before him.

[How much blood had to be spilled beneath the hooves of the Demon General Ugripos, the King of all Balrogs? Our forces numbered 103 when we encountered him, yet the only ones to survive in the end were the Seven Heroes and a nameless child.]

“....”

Sungchul focused all of his senses on the demon in front of him. It was different than the average Balrog. It was larger and exuded a stronger aura.

“Uwahaha!”

Ugripos let loose a thunderous laughter and swung his massive ax like a windmill. Strong gusts of winds caused the flames of hell to erupt from the ground dyeing the scene an infernal red. Within the flames and the wind, Sungchul gripped Fal Garaz and stood unshaken against the king of Balrogs.

Wham!

Sungchul's hammer soon landed a critical hit upon Ugripos, but the moment they made contact, Ugripos evaded the blow by leaving behind an illusion made of flames, just like a cicada shedding its shell.

“Your attacks will never reach me.”

The demon spoke, but Sungchul didn't stop. He blindly swung his hammer towards Ugripos again. It wasn't just once, but it was a continuous blow which appeared as though several dozens of hammers were attacking simultaneously.

Ugripos tried to use his evasive technique again, but after using

the skill for the third time, Sungchul's hammer finally found its mark.

“N-no! Save me! No!!!”

The King of Balrogs while in the air, clenched his fists as the merciless barrage of blows pounded his body, and finally, he perished.

“....”

Sungchul loosened his grip on the bloody hammer and calmed his breathing as he stood over the demon's corpse. There was a burning land beyond the dark clouds. Demonic Realm; the land of devils. This was the end of the path of Sajators. The scene of the Demonic Realm suddenly vanished, and the featureless barren lands surrounded him once more.

“Amazing! I can't believe there was a human capable of brute-forcing his way through the path like this.”

He heard a voice from behind. It was a voice full of youth and vigor. Sungchul turned around to respond to the owner of the voice. It was a magician wearing a pure white robe; he wielded a staff that was slightly larger than he himself. Sungchul didn't feel a presence from him, which meant that it was simply an apparition made of magic. However, Sungchul was still surprised.

‘So this is Sajators.’

He looked younger than Sungchul had anticipated. No, ‘childish’ would be more accurate. Unlike the typical elderly mages who have diligently trained for their entire lives to obtain power, he seemed more like a gifted prodigy who did not have control over his overwhelming strength and was likely to act out on a whim.

“So you’re the human that Vestiare was talking about. Your strength is a most thrilling thing to behold, and so unwavering to boot. Really, I think you have the greatest potential I have yet to see!”

Sungchul only quietly responded.

“Stop yacking away like a bitch. Hand over the rewards and fuck off.”

Sajatars grinned so widely that he showed his teeth.

“The rewards will come. A promise is a promise! I just want to ask one thing: for what do you fight?”

He coiled his legs in the air and crossed his arms as he looked down upon Sungchul.

“To bash your head in.”

Sungchul fidgeted with his hammer while speaking.

“Haha! Truly an interesting friend. Ok. You sound a bit impatient, so I’ll reward you first.”

Sajators smirked while putting his hands together. Magical letters blossomed like flowers, appearing and disappearing around his hands, and after a while, several items appeared in his palms. Sajators grabbed one of the items and pushed it towards Sungchul.

“How about this? Friend?”

“What’s this?”

Sajators formed an evil smile at Sungchul’s question and answered.

“Final Elixir.”

Sungchul’s eyes visibly shook.

‘He said Final Elixir...? Is this really the elixir...?!’

Final Elixir.

It is the king of all medicine said to even be able to resurrect the deceased, but the true value of the Final Elixir lay elsewhere. Final Elixir was one of the only two known methods that could undo the Curse of Extinction.

“If you don’t like it, I have other items here. Feel free to choose carefully.”

Sajatrs laid down several items that also included legendary artefacts, magical scrolls filled with mystery, and other items that were difficult to look away from. However, Sungchul’s eyes only held the Final Elixir within.

“....”

With his eyes filled with longing, Sungchul reached out for the elixir. Sajators’s cruel smile deepened when his hands finally came in contact with the final elixir.

“Dear me. It’s a miss.”

When his fingers touched the Final Elixir, the legendary medicine turned to dust and scattered on the floor. Sajators’s heartless words followed after a cold laughter.

“Now I know what you fight for. Fatherly love... Such a painful word for you, isn’t it?”

“...”

“Why so quiet? Don’t tell me you’re angry? Hm?”

At that moment, Sajators's apparition could feel an indescribable pressure bearing down upon him.

"Oh my...?"

A fierce combat aura made from pure wrath billowed out of the poorly dressed young man. The hammer slowly rose.

Sajators's apparition tried to escape, but he discovered that the intangible murderous intent had bound him in place.

"Damn."

The apparition was struck down by the hammer, and it shattered into pieces. However, it never lost its composure, as if still mocking Sungchul until the very end.

"Let's meet again next time, friend. It won't turn out like this that time!"

The cold voice weakly echoed as it broke apart, and bright letters appeared before Sungchul.

[You have completed Sajators' path.]

[You have achieved the mission 'Completionist of the Unknown Path (Hidden – Epic)'.]

Rewards: 1. Magic Power +25

2. Magic Blade – Infernal Heart (Rare)

Chapter 25 – Ahmuge (3)

The first rewards on the list were similar to last time. The 25 Magic Power upgrade was a significant boon. There weren't many opportunities to raise a stat by anything more than 20, no matter how low the base stat was. However, he still had one complaint.

‘They didn't give me any Palace Tokens. Is that because I got the blade?’

Sungchul held up the Magic Blade: Infernal Heart.

[Magic Blade: Infernal Heart]

Grade: Rare – Mid grade

Type: Blade – Magical

Effect: Well-tempered edge +10 Strength Flame attribute

Note: A blade crafted by a mad blacksmith inside of a molten lake in which a fire spirits resides. He burned to death immediately after the blade was completed.

It was a decent blade. It was meant to be used by beginners, like the Magic Staff: Moonlight he had previously received, but the blade would also be decent enough in mid-level. It might be the best item one could earn within the Summoning Palace.

Within the well-tempered blade, the muted aura of a flame spoke

well of the blade's quality, and the balance also felt good, enough for it to feel weightless.

Sungchul swung the blade as a test, and a streak of flames formed along the path it had been swung in. Using it, it would cause critical damage by slicing open then searing the exposed flesh.

“Not bad.”

However, he also knew that this wasn't everything. It was similar to Vestiare's case. The Seventh Heroes rewarded twice.

Sungchul grabbed Fal Garaz and the rewards and waited for the expected message to appear. It did.

[The Seven Heroes – Sajators laughs raucously at your ability to overcome danger.]

Sungchul's eyes emitted a cold light.

“Laugh it up while you can.”

[Seven Heroes – Sajators has decided to bestow a special reward for overcoming danger.]

Reward:

- 1. Map made of Goblin hide
- 2. Blue Ruby Ring

The true reward for overcoming the dangers had appeared. A single map and a single ring fell to the floor. The rewards didn't make sense, similar to the case with Vestiare.

He first picked up the map made of Goblin hide.

[Map made of Goblin Hide]

Grade: Common

Type: Misc Item

Effect: None

Note: It was made in a hurry due to a commander's order.

The explanation had Sajators' distinct style to it. Other than the preservation, there didn't seem to be any magical power coming from it; it seemed just like a normal map. The map was made of a goblin hide which reeked of savagery, and the quality wasn't much better than that of a drunken pirate captain's crudely drawn map.

The map pointed to an untamed rainforest set beneath a mountain range called the Screaming Sword's Edge Mountain Range. Screaming Sword's Edge Mountain Range was located at the southernmost tip of the continent and was one of its

unexplored territories. There were no sources of income here, and it had nearly no quest rewards in the whole area. There were only frequent status afflictions, stench, and zoonoses carried by irritating monsters here; the xenophobic Hermit Kingdom of Lizardmen was all that awaited the visitors at the end. Sungchul, who in this world was second to none in terms of strength, had never even thought of going there because of the pure annoyance the journey would be.

‘Screaming Sword’s Edge Mountain Range... that area’s a fucking shithole.’

There was some writing scrawled at the bottom of the map.

– Why do you think I gave you the Infernal Heart? If you have a head, try using it.

Beneath that was another set of markings scrawled out with a pen. It was hard to make out as it didn’t seem to have been written with ink but had rather been scratched out with just the pen’s dry tip.

His laughter escaped through his nose.

“They say a person acts the way he appears... how immature.”

Sungchul didn’t appreciate the host’s need to play pranks rather than simply handing things over. However, they say a thirsty man will dig a well. He grabbed both the map and Infernal heart and

began contemplating on how to uncover the trick. He eventually succeeded in finding the secret. When Infernal Heart, with its fiery aura, was placed beneath the map a new message appeared.

It was in an ancient text. It was written in a long forgotten language that only a rare few could decipher. Fortunately, Sungchul just happened to be one of those few people.

He stumbled through his memories to decipher the message.

‘Strong...powerful...morning...if...ask...cute...critter...ring...like...sunlight...shine...earth...release...together...incantation...secret...through’

He might be able to translate the text, but his ability to decipher the message was poor. Actually, it was abysmal. At most, he was only able to fit together some of the words that he already knew.

“Mmm...”

However, Sungchul was the master of making things up as he went along. He had the ability to pick up the important context from these seemingly unrelated words.

‘Together, incantation... this... Is this referring to the Multicast? I think this map is a record on how to obtain Multicast.

Sungchul’s eyes sparkled with curiosity.

There was also another item; the Blue Ruby Ring that was called Angel's Tear.

[Blue Ruby Ring]

Grade: Rare

Type: Misc Item

Effect: High-Value Item

Note: The Blue Ruby Ring is the greatest reagent, but due to its weak reactivity, it isn't often used. Its beautiful light and pattern makes it favorable for use as decorations.

Similar to the Goblin hide, it was another normal item. No matter how carefully he inspected it, there were no special characteristics to it. Truth's Eye also gave the same results. There wasn't even a hidden message like there was with the map, but it seemed to be the key to uncovering the clue leading to Sajators' deepest secret: Multicast.

Like Vestiare, Sajators wouldn't leave behind a thoughtless reward.

'I guess the true reward that he left can only be found by crossing over the Screaming Sword's Edge Mountain Range.'

Sungchul placed both items into his soul storage and watched as

the barrier surrounding him broke down. The void space disappeared, and he returned to the scene of the pond that was surrounded by a thick forest.

He heard a familiar voice.

“Already done?”

It was Ahmuge.

As she had been meditating, it seems like she was also diligently performing her common quests. Sungchul looked up to the sky. The sun was already setting to the west.

“How much time has passed?”

“About 2 hours.”

“I see.”

Sungchul backed away from the statue and got out of the pond. As soon as he was out, the statue in the center broke and collapsed.

“Hm?”

Ahmuge was surprised and rushed towards the statue. She ignored her wet clothes and inspected the rubble with her hands.

‘Hm? The quest disappeared? How can this be? I heard that the Seven Heroes struck down the people they didn’t like, but I never heard of them destroying a core structure like this...’

Her eyes grew wider then turned towards Sungchul.

“How did this happen?”

“Dunno.”

Sungchul obviously knew, but he still kept his mouth shut. Nothing good would come from blathering about completing missions.

Ahmuge stared at his face while blushing then asked him carefully.

“Perhaps... did you fulfill its purpose?”

“...”

He didn’t make any movement one way or the other. He glared at her and responded calmly.

“Didn’t we agree not to ask each other questions?”

It was the single most important promise between them. No matter how excited she'd become, Ahmuge still realized the importance of such a promise.

“Ah... yes... that we did.”

She forcibly calmed her breathing, and returned to her normal, calm self.

“I apologize for prying.”

“Ok.”

Sungchul was just moving towards the plaza when an unexpected noise erupted from his stomach.

Grrrrrwl.

Moving for the first time in a while really made him work up an appetite.

Ahmuge clearly heard the noise.

“It sounds like someone's hungry?”

A natural bodily function quickly shifted the atmosphere. An awkward smile formed upon her lips, and Sungchul simply nodded

with no particular expression. He spoke towards Ahmuge.

“I’m going to prepare a meal. Care to join me?”

“It’s ok. I have no interest chewing those bricks they call bread.”

Ahmuge politely declined and tried to head back, but Sungchul spoke to her retreating figure again.

“Is that right? I got some meat from the rank match. I was prepared to show off some of my skills...”

The hardest challenge Sungchul had faced after he became the enemy of the world was obtaining a proper meal. He fed himself with poorly cooked meat, fruit, and some grass, but that was only good enough for a couple of days. His desire for a decent meal had kept growing until it could no longer be suppressed.

He ended up choosing chef as his first sub-class, and since then he had embarked on a difficult world wide journey to become a true chef. By the time Sungchul qualified for the prestigious title of ‘Chef De Cuisine’, a philosophy had taken root in his heart; When hungry, one should eat delicious food.

He finally developed quite an appetite after a while, so this was the best opportunity he had to eat something delicious. He had decent ingredients with him, and his friendly guest had also given him a good quest.

“What do you mean... when you say meat? Are you perhaps talking about the mystery meat they’d given us after the rank match?”

Ahmuge obviously had gotten some meat before. She had earned first place during the death match, but it wasn’t easy to prepare the meat.

“It smelled bad and wasn’t it also too tough to eat? I’d rather have a few more apples than that.”

She must have already tried eating it, but it sounds like she had prepared it poorly.

A mysterious smile formed on Sungchul’s lips.

“The Regal Mountain Chicken is something that can be put on a king’s plate.”

“Regal... Mountain... Chicken...? Is that the name of the meat?”

“Just trust me. I have complete faith in my cooking ability.”

—

Sungchul led Ahmuge towards a cave at the cliff’s edge, but a familiar smell emanated from the area around the cave.

“Is this... the smell of human blood?”

Ahmuge’s eyes grew cold. Sungchul raised his hand and moved over.

“Wait. It looks like some unwelcome guests may have been here.”

Sungchul slowly headed towards the cave. Blood stains and bloody footprints were strewn about the cave entrance. By the shape of the footprints, someone must have gotten punished by the cave’s owner and had been chased out.

“Krrrrr!”

The cave owner’s pair of eyes lit up brightly within the darkness as he revealed himself. It was a massive bear which reached 5 meters in height. It looked like a bear, but it also had the pattern of a tiger on its pelt. Tiger Bear; a creature that roamed the vicinity of the Summoning Palace, despite its fearsome appearance, this monster was similar to a herbivore. It especially enjoyed eating honey. However, this massive beast was still capable of using its fearsome size to injure dozens of amateur summoned without putting in too much effort.

Beginner summoned could easily be killed by it.

Sungchul stared down the Tiger Bear. It looked defiant, but when its eyes met with Sungchul, it froze.

“Back off.”

The phrase dropped over it like a blizzard and the large beast crawled deeper into the cave. Watching the scene, Ahmuge carefully asked a question.

“Perhaps... are you a Druid...?”

“ ... ”

He couldn't say that last summer, he had beaten the bear like a stray dog until the very sight of him would cause the bear to run away in fear, so Sungchul only sighed in relief as entered the cave.

‘It was good that I hid this inside the bear's cave. Three weeks after arriving in this world, a few of the summoned have already grown strong enough to venture this far out.’

The meat that had been stored in the cave was certainly safe. He ignored the Tiger Bear that was peeking at him as it trembled in fear, and brought out the portion of meat that had been well preserved in a cool area of the cave. It was chicken meat that was wrapped in tree leaves.

“Wait, why don't we gather some ingredients.”

Sungchul apologized and left his seat to bring out a small box from his soul storage. There were some essential ingredients within the box and also some extremely precious spices that were

important for cooking. He only subtly took out some ingredients that wouldn't stand out and wrapped it in a leaf before taking out a different box. This box was filled with dried vegetables and mushrooms and other similarly preserved foods. Sungchul took out a few different types of mushrooms and returned to Ahmuge.

“It might take an hour and a half. Will you wait?”

Ahmuge nodded.

Sungchul packed the ingredients he had gathered into the chicken, wrapped the chicken in a broad leaf, then smeared it in mud.

“What are you doing?”

Ahmuge, who had been watching Sungchul, asked a question.

“Cooking.”

Sungchul, after putting a thick layer of mud onto the chicken, lit a fire and placed the mud-covered chicken on top of it. It looked too primitive to call it ‘cooking’... at least in Ahmuge's perspective.

An hour and a half passed. Sungchul pulled the crisply cooked mud out of the fire and began to break the muddy exterior with the pommel of his beginner's blade.

Thud.

The mud layer broke apart, and the aroma of meat spread throughout the air. Ahmuge's eyes lit up in excitement as drool filled her mouth.

‘What... in the world is this? This aroma...?!’

Sungchul quietly broke apart the mud, then pushed half of the chicken over to Ahmuge.

“It’s not great, but give it a try.”

Ahmuge looked at the juicy flesh which was revealing its golden meat then swallowed her drool before ripping off a piece and putting it into her mouth.

“...Ah!!”

As the meat entered her mouth, the Regal Mountain Chicken's life was played out like a panorama before Ahmuge's eyes. His life-or-death battle with the egg shell, his battle for food with his siblings, his teenage years molting out of his cotton feathers into proper ones, and his fateful meeting with a hen on another mountain... then finally, his slaughter.

‘So delicious. It’s my first time eating something so delicious...!!’

She could barely contain her tears as she ate her first proper meal in a long time. Reputation or etiquette was meaningless in front of such absolute flavor.

To Sungchul, it tasted rather plain.

‘58 points. The ingredients and tools weren’t up to snuff, so it was difficult to make anything worth over 50 points.’

The chef class had the ability to see the score of any food they tasted. It was quite useless to Sungchul, but it was still a decent meal.

When the meal ended, they both headed towards the plaza. Ahmuge, who had been silent for a while, caught up with him with soft steps before asking her question.

“How about we make a deal?”

Chapter 26 – Selection Match (1)

“A trade?”

Sungchul’s foot stopped. Ahmuge continued to speak to his back.

“You know what the next rank match ruleset will be, right?”

Sungchul nodded.

The next ruleset was the cross-plaza battle rule. It was simple. 30 fighters would be chosen from each plaza, and the plaza with the most fighters remaining after the battle would be declared as the winner. The only unique aspect of the cross-plaza battle was that forfeits and draws were still accepted, and there were also penalties.

Some might say that it was a disfavorable ruleset as the majority of the people would not really receive any benefits, but these rules still allowed people to keep their precious lives through forfeit. It was the reason that many considered the Cross-plaza battle the most relaxed of all the rank matches, but for the participants, this wasn’t really the case.

Currently 6 ~700 summoned were still alive in the Blanche plaza. Of those, only 30 would be given a chance to fight as the representative of their plaza in the arena. The rest were forced to participate in a betting game with their lives on the line.

The ‘guess the winner 30 times in a row or die’ game.

From the day Summoning Palace was established, not a single person has been able to get out alive of this mini-game. In other words, survival depended entirely on making to the top 30 through the hellish qualifier rounds.

“...It is regarding the upcoming Captain Match.”

She said after a brief moment of silence.

“I do believe that we have already joined hands, but I just want to confirm whether the feeling was mutual.”

No one was trustworthy in Otherworld. It would be extremely naive for her to take a generous meal as a sign of good faith. This was a world where today’s friends could turn out to be tomorrow’s enemy. It was better to be even more wary of a formidable ally than of a formidable enemy.

Ahmuge’s first impression was that Sungchul was quite average. He looked like a person with no defining characteristics. His swordsmanship was average, and neither his speed nor strength was anything to brag about. However, as time passed, she started to feel that there might be some sort of overwhelming strength hidden within him.

Like during the Tam Tam match and during the werewolf incident. He strangely enough, got past each problem by a slim

margin, each problem had still been thoroughly solved. He had even managed to kill the werewolf Ahram on his own and managed to erase the Path of Sajators mission by completing it. The only person who could ever manage to make her feel wary would be this 'average person'.

'No one had solved the Path of Seven Heroes which had been left at the Summoning Palace even after thousands of years. But this person got through in just 2 hours.'

The missions of the Seven Heroes was well known to be impossible to solve regardless of the amount of training and preparation that went in beforehand. This was because the Path of the Seven Heroes didn't simply look at the participant's capabilities but it also looked at their potential. The quest rejected or even killed, people who had merely received their outstanding stats from outside powers.

Sajators was also known to be one of the most excessive of the Seven Heroes. For that man to have solved Sajators's mission within two hours, would mean either one of two things: his talent was outstanding enough to please Sajators, or Sajators himself had taken a liking to him.

'I don't know how he managed to complete the mission, but he's definitely not ordinary. I should avoid making an enemy out of him.'

Ahmuge thought as she revealed her most carefully guarded bargaining chip.

“It isn’t likely, but if I am about to lose my life, I want you to help me. If I manage to survive the cross-plaza battle safely, I will tell you the location of another Path of the Seven Heroes.”

Curiosity lit up in Sungchul’s eyes.

“Another Path of the Seven Heroes? Are you saying there are more Seven Heroes quests around here other than Sajators?”

It was a question that he had already assumed to be the case, but he asked her with an innocent face that managed to fool Ahmuge. She nodded and then began to explain.

“...before the final battle took place, the Seven Heroes gathered at the Summoning Palace and left paths filled with their individual visions. This was so that if they ever failed, they could prepare someone else to carry their burdens for them.”

Sungchul fell into contemplation after hearing her explanation. It was a win-win situation for him. He had no plans of fighting her, and it wouldn’t be easy for a person like her to fall into danger either. It would be unlikely that he would need to step in to fulfill this bargain. It was also a great opportunity for him. He could memorize the faces of the Seven Heroes through their remnants. Which would later make killing them a whole lot easier.

After organizing his thoughts, he raised his head.

“Ok...”

He was about to accept when a cold murderous aura approached from nearby.

“Someone is coming.”

It wasn't a monster. It was the aura of a person.

Sungchul quickly hid within the forest foliage, but Ahmuge felt the presence too late and had to hide her presence right beside Sungchul. When she erased her presence, it caused a big surprise for him.

‘This woman...’

Her presence disappeared completely, to the extent that he couldn't feel her even though she was directly next to him. Rather than an acquired skill, this must be a skill she had naturally been born with.

A small group of people revealed themselves beyond the forest. Using a lantern's light to guide their way was a pathetic group with prosthetic arms and legs and robes made of dog skin. There were 7 of them. There were also disfigured homunculi leashed to dog collars that were crawling along and kicked around by these people.

Sungchul immediately realized who they were.

‘Slave hunters.’

It was unexpected. The only time slave hunters have ever stepped into the plazas was during the mass summoning in the first week to mark their slaves, but they normally would never enter the plaza otherwise. Well, that was unless they had some special instructions from one of their cruel puppeteers.

“It is over here! Master! There are footprints leading towards the cliff face!”

A homunculus that was missing an arm inspected the floor carefully and began shouting loudly. The slave hunters nodded towards each other and moved towards the direction indicated by the homunculus.

After they left, Sungchul and Ahmuge both came out of hiding.

“What was that about?”

“I’m not sure.”

Sungchul walked over to where the slave hunters had been and stood on his knee to inspect the floor. There were footprints scattered all about, but he distinctly recognized the footprint that the homunculus had found.

“.....”

It was a familiar footprint. It was Ahmuge's.

'So that's it.'

As predicted, the homunculus had pointed out a footprint that matched her's. Which meant that for some reason, Ahmuge was being targeted.

Has her identity as a reincarnate been discovered?'

Reincarnates were not welcome in these troubled times, the world also wasn't naive enough to allow them to do as they wished, since they had returned with knowledge of the future. Sungchul was fully aware of how those with powers treated the reincarnates. They were seen as bags of meat that could tell them about the uncertain future; nothing more; nothing less.

Most would be captured early on and would be tortured until they spat out information about the future, despite the irregularity doing this would cause, before eventually dying. It was very likely that Ahmuge would also share this fate.

"... It would be wise to be careful from here on. They are looking for you."

This was the most Sungchul could do. He had no desire to help her out and entangle himself with a reincarnate hunt. The ability to coordinate a reincarnate hunt indicated that the person behind

this had quite the background.

“Curious. Why are they following me? It’s hard to say with my own mouth, but I’m not all that pretty... Don’t worry too much about it. I am confident that I can take care of myself.”

Ahmuge responded lightly as though she was unconcerned. Sungchul simply nodded and headed towards the plaza first.

“Let’s split up here. I’ll return to the plaza first.”

“Ah... regarding what we talked about before...?”

Ahmuge called out to him before he left. Sungchul didn’t stop as he gave his answer.

“Let’s just say I agree to the proposal. I’ll help you during the Captain Match, but I expect you to follow through on your end of the deal.”

Saying that, he hurriedly left the forest.

A small guest was waiting for him at the entrance of the plaza. The guest leaped up into the air when he entered then landed on Sungchul’s shoulder.

“Kyu Kyu!”

It was Krill's Sky Squirrel.

Sungchul checked the content of the message in the small pouch around the squirrel's neck.

[I will be waiting at a corner of the outer wall. My little friend will guide you.]

—

The atmosphere surrounding Krill was different at this second meeting. Krill had felt naive and immature before this, filled with the air of a rookie mage, but the Krill that was waiting beneath the palace walls now had the air of a relatively experienced mage.

“It's been a while, Mr. Sungchul Kim.”

Rather than a natural leisure coming from the heart, there was an obviously forced leisure surrounding his whole posture.

“....Why did you want to meet?”

Sungchul's attitude was cold, and Krill laughed lightly as he spoke.

“It's just that... there's a small problem. Yes... I need more

money. A lot more than usual. The pressure from higher ups is getting stronger. I have to bear it every day now. I swear they're intending to rob me completely with the way they've been pecking away at me."

Sungchul stared at Krill with passive eyes. Despite Sungchul's silence, Krill began to scratch his head as though he felt some disdain coming from the gaze.

"Help me one last time. It'll be over after this."

"Last, you say?"

"Yes. No matter how much more that person demands, I think this will be the final one. I promise with my name on it."

Krill thumped his chest lightly with his left fist as to reinforce this promise.

"What value does your name have?"

Sungchul's response was cold, and Krill's lips twitched briefly.

'This fucker...'

It was a brief moment, but there was no way Sungchul would've missed it.

‘His head must have grown after all this time.’

After a brief silence, Sungchul pulled out 3 more gems from his possession.

“This is the final one.”

Krill accepted the gems with both his hands in a bow.

“Oh my! 3 of these precious things! I’m ever grateful!”

Krill smiled widely as he tossed over a bracelet.

“Actually, the reason for this meeting was to hand over this thing. It’s too heavy for the little guy to carry.”

It was a worn bracelet made out of brass. Sungchul felt its weight on receiving it; just as Krill had said, it would have been too heavy for the Sky Squirrel to carry.

“What is this?”

Sungchul gripped the bracelet and asked.

“Let’s just call it an entry pass to a guaranteed safe passage into the Summoning Palace.”

“Speak plainly.”

“Yes. Yes. I’ll explain again. If you wear this bracelet, you’ll be able to obtain a miraculous victory with no effort through the selection match and also the final match!

It looked like a plain bracelet on the outside. As he appraised it, it appeared to be a plain object with no magical effects to it. Krill put away the three gems and flicked his fingers to call over the pet to his own shoulder.

“Just participate during the selection match wearing this bracelet, and you’ll realize its real value. There might be some sudden circumstances, so don’t panic and simply accept things as they come. There is nothing to gain from standing out!”

Krill deeply bowed once more, put on the robe’s hood, and disappeared into the darkness.

Sungchul silently fiddled with the bracelet, carefully observing it. It looked like an ordinary bracelet, but Sungchul’s Legend rank skill, Truth’s Eye, activated to list off all the information hidden within.

[Bracelet of Alias]

Grade: Rare – Midgrade

Type: Equipment

Effect: Hides Midgrade Equipment / Bestows Alias

Alias: Ahram Park

Note: Disguises the user with the desired name. However, cannot disguise stats.

Two tricks were at play here.

One was the veil cast over the equipment. Items with equipment veils would not display their item stats by simply looking at them or using them.

Another was the Alias Bestowal. The one wearing the bracelet would be acknowledged with the alias written into the bracelet.

These two tricks were working together to establish Sungchul as Ahram. Sungchul was disappointed. It was such a pathetic and childish method. However, there might be some heinous and despicable plot waiting at the other side of it. So despite what he thought, Sungchul still put on the bracelet without a moment's hesitation.

“... The only good magician, is a dead magician.”

Krill would never have dreamed that the person he was trying to trick was a man who held the world record for killing the most number of magicians.

Note: A short note on Reincarnates in case a few readers have

some confusion. There are 2 types of Reincarnates.

The first type of Reincarnates are those who in exchange of their skills and accomplishments choose to go back to Earth from Other World, this type has been mentioned in chapter 6 and 8. For example the person who told Ahram about his identity as Sungtek's son, was a Reincarnate as he chose to return to Earth.

The second type of Reincarnates are those who go back in time to the Summoning Palace starting as initiates again with their memory intact, this type has been mentioned in chapter 18 and 22. For example: Ahmuge, as mentioned in this chapter seems to be a Reincarnate according to Sungchul. This means she might have gone back in time with her memories intact starting again from the Summoning Palace. So she might have knowledge about future events, this is why Reincarnates get hunted whenever they are found.

Chapter 27 – Selection Match (2)

The day after the incident.

The homunculi met within Blanche Plaza at midnight and gathered in a circle as they began chanting an ominous curse.

“Detderodero... Detderodero...”

One by one, the Summoned were aroused from their sleep to the strange behavior of the homunculi. The onlookers soon realized that the surface of the plaza below the hovering homunculi was rising. A circular structure about the size of a basketball court took shape.

“Now now. Humans! It is time to pay attention! This is the debut of the new Drill Sergeant!”

As the ritual of the homunculi continued, the new Drill Sergeant appeared before the humans. Its size didn't quite match the uniquely large stature of its predecessor, but it was still larger than the average homunculus, and further stood out by wearing a black hat.

The new Drill Sergeant stepped onto a platform and let out a fake cough before he began his unoriginal speech.

“The Drill Sergeant before you is a homunculus of 10 years that has overseen and led the humans with his bountiful experience,

discipline, interest, and curiosity; I have given the lazy humans necessary guidance to adjust to this world...”

It was a Drill Sergeant’s acceptance speech.

“It is too cool!”

“I truly want to be a Drill Sergeant like that one day!”

Only the homunculi had looks of envy, while not a single human paid any attention at all.

Once the arena was fully constructed, the Drill Sergeant quickly changed the subject and explained the day’s events.

“Now! Humans! It’s time to perk up your ears and listen! We will be holding the qualification rounds to choose 30 individuals who will be representing Blanche plaza in the inter plaza arena matches!”

The summoned who had been ignoring the acceptance speech quickly changed their attitudes and concentrated on listening to the explanation about the selection match. After the explanation ended, they showed a variety of reactions.

“Anyone who didn’t qualify to be one of the 30 representatives will be relegated to a penalty gambling game with their lives on the line... what is this?”

“A selection match means we have to fight among ourselves, right? I don’t like the sound of that.”

“I didn’t fight so hard to make it this far, only to bid my life in a gamble and die. I’m going to fight to make it in the top 30 no matter what.”

The whole plaza was teeming with whispers.

The new Drill Sergeant watched over the summoned with a mysterious smile before looking back and waving his hand.

Ziiing~~~~

A sound which shook the eardrums began ringing from within the arena. A single homunculus with ear plugs calmly held a drumstick beside a [Jing](#) several times larger than himself. The massive tremors calmed the chaos within the plaza. The Drill Sergeant once again had everyone’s attention.

a Jing is a traditional Korean gong

“... Now! Now! The explanation is over! We will now start the selection match! As we have explained, the victor will be decided by unarmed combat! Those that want to participate in the competition should now step onto the arena!”

People remained hesitant and looked at each other. They weren’t familiar with unarmed combat. It essentially meant that it would

be a series of one vs one fist fights. However, unlike modern matches, the winner would have to face off against new challengers until nobody else stepped forward. It would quickly end if a challenger that was unimaginably more powerful than the others appeared, but it could also endlessly drag on with mediocre challengers. Many of the summoned were mediocre and thought it wouldn't benefit them if they hurried into the arena.

After enough time had passed to drink a cup of tea with no participants, the Drill Sergeant stepped out once again.

“Now, humans! You will regret it if you don't step up for the selection match! Come up quickly!”

After hearing those words, one man mustered up his courage and stepped onto the circular arena. He was an average man with no distinguishing features. He also wore some tattered casual clothing.

“Now, the first representative candidate has appeared! Are there no challengers? I'll give you 30 seconds! You must challenge the representative candidate by that time!”

Ziiing~~~

The Jing rang out indicating the time, and after a while, the indicated time ended. Surprisingly, no one had stepped up. Everyone was too busy eyeing one another.

‘I think that even I can win at that level...’

‘Should I just wait to see how things work out for now?’

‘They said that 30 people would be selected. I’m sure it’ll be fine if I miss out on the first slot.’

30 seconds had passed by quickly as various calculations were fiercely being made. The sound of the Jing indicating the closing time rang out and the first representative had been chosen.

“Now! Now! Humans! The first candidate has been chosen! There are 29 slots left! It’s time to stop looking around and step up with courage!”

It was such an absurd conclusion. No one had expected the representative selection method to be this simple. The man who was the first to muster that small amount of courage simply scratched his head with a disbelieving expression on his face. The faces of those who had hesitated flashed with disappointment. Various thoughts were seeping into their minds.

‘Ah... should I have stepped out?’

‘I could have won at that level....’

‘Ah, it’s just the first slot. There will be other chances!’

However, human beings were creatures who tended to think and act the same. A rare scene occurred where dozens of people stepped up at once as the second representative candidate was being chosen. Several people began crying out in distress; Chaos ensued as the arena filled up to the brim with challengers for the second slot.

“One at a time! You will enter one at a time! Trash humans! You will follow order!”

The Drill Sergeant tried to shout, but no one was listening. They were too busy trying to defend their position while shoving and shouting profanities at each other. At that moment, one man stepped up

“Hey! Hey! Shove off! This fuck...”

A scrawny stature, sparkling eyes, and a distinct, eye-catching tattoo covering his entire body. It was Jungshik Chun. Everything turned upside down as soon as he stepped onto the platform. The humans that didn't budge from the Drill Sergeant's words were frozen like mice staring at a cat when they saw Jungshik.

Jungshik pulled out his Blade of Swiftness and peered over towards the Drill Sergeant.

“Can I kill them?”

The Drill Sergeant opened his mouth and revealed his saw-like

teeth.

“Humans that are quick to understand are always a welcome sight!”

As soon as the permission was given, Jungshik rushed towards the crowd without a second's hesitation. One man pulled out his sword, pitifully trying to defend himself, but he only fell over in a fountain of blood as he lost his head in a single slice.

“Kwaaaak!”

The people on the platform began to jump off as soon as the first person was killed. All the dogs were chased away by the forceful entry of a lion. Jungshik looked down at the people and licked his lips with a disappointed expression. He was chosen for the second representative slot when the Jing sounded the round's end.

The next few selections followed a similar rhythm. Jungshik's subordinates, with their aggression and combat strength, followed him into the proceeding representative slots. Eight slots were consecutively filled by Jungshik's faction. It looked as though Jungshik's members would take all of the fighter slots.

At the 10th representative selection, Sungchul, who had been in a corner, quietly stepped onto the platform. Jungshik's subordinates tried to threaten him with murderous eyes and taunts, but Sungchul seemed totally unconcerned.

“ ... ”

The Bracelet of Alias which was strapped onto his left arm began to respond quietly. The bracelet itself only had the ability to bestow him with an alias, but what effect this would have on the situation was yet to be seen.

“I will step up.”

Soon, one man climbed up to the platform. It was one of Jungshik's men who had a healthy body and a knife scar across his eye. He was carrying a hefty axe that suited his size.

“A challenger has appeared! Now the selection match will begin!”

Sungchul pulled out his beginner sword and prepared to go up. But before he could, someone had already stepped up into the arena. It was a poorly-dressed man wearing a deep fisherman's hat. He was dressed in a red shirt that was closer to a rag and worn jeans which were similarly tattered like Sungchul's. The bright graphic '[2002 Be the Red!](#)' was written on the red shirt. A mysterious light flashed across Sungchul's eyes.

The shirt slogan “2002 Be the Red!” refers to the 2002 Olympics when Koreans called themselves the Red Devils.

‘This guy...’

The new intruder walked past Sungchul and trudged in front of Jungshik's subordinate.

“What? Who are you?”

Jungshik’s axe-wielding goon glared at the man threateningly, but the only response he got was the flashing blade of a sword.

Clang!

The sword edge and the axe edge sparked after clashing. The eyes of Jungshik’s goon twitched. The axe was being pushed back without resistance. The axe-wielding man squeezed out every bit of his strength and pushed the man’s sword with all his might while letting out a wild shout.

“Hoo Ha!!”

However, the pushed sword smoothly changed its trajectory and flew into his blind spot.

Slice-

The head of Jungshik’s goon who had just let out a roar was sliced off clean, flying into the sky drawing a parabola as it went.

Splat!

The moment his head hit the ground, the headless body shook before it collapsed as well.

“....”

A heavy atmosphere once again enveloped the plaza. Hosung Ro, another goon from Jungshik's gang, finally broke the silence as his temper exploded.

“This bastard!”

“You dare kill Jong Gilly? I'm going to fucking kill you today!”

Jungshik's gang exploded like a wildfire. About a dozen men walked onto the arena at the same time with their weapons in hand. It looked as though the man in the fisherman's hat was in danger.

Sunghul had been quietly observing the situation. He discovered that the state of the man in the fisherman's hat was quite strange. He wasn't under the effect of some spell or illusion. It felt strange at a more fundamental level. Sungchul finally arrived at the answer.

‘These fuckers...’

Two more people stepped up to the plaza. They all wore some hiking hat or fisherman's hat to cover their face and wore clothes tattered enough to be rags. Their breathing was synchronized like a machine, and they did not share a single word of communication.

Shng-

Two more swords were drawn. The men in rags slowly walked up towards Jungshik's men.

“Wanna go at it? Huh?”

“Where did these fucks roll up from?”

Scared dogs bark. The goons continued to dig their graves as they relentlessly shouted profanities. About a dozen more men stepped onto the arena. It was now 25 vs 3. No matter who saw it, Jungshik's men should have the victory. His faction consisted of a group of elites that preferred to operate in smaller groups, and now they also had the upper hand in numbers. However, what unfolded next was completely unexpected.

Slice! Stab!

The swordsmanship of the ragged men was god-like. Their swords parried and blocked the swords of their enemies before unfailingly driving either the blade's edge or tip into their enemy's vitals.

It didn't take long for countless heads to roll across the ground and cover the floor in blood. Jungshik's men, after losing more than two-thirds of their forces, ran off in a blind panic.

“...”

The ragged men silently observed below before leaving Sungchul and stepping down themselves. Finally, the Drill Sergeant's joyful voice rang out.

“Remaining time is 30 seconds!”

Sungchul was watching the back of the ragged men as the Jing rang out to indicate the end.

‘As I thought... They were Swordslaves.’

Not all slaves captured within the Summoning Plaza were sold off. Depending on the whim of the buyers, some of the slaves were returned before being claimed. However, the summoned, from the moment they fell into the hands of the slave hunters, were left in an awkward position of being neither a summoned nor a resident of this world. In other words, they were stuck in limbo.

These homeless existences would more than likely be eliminated, but a portion of them that were determined to be talented were utilized for various purposes. They were slaves trained in the way of the sword called ‘Swordslaves’. Their stats weren’t outstanding, but they had a high mastery of the sword after being forced to hone their swordsmanship and were even able to cut down enemies stronger than them due to their lack of fear or emotions. Now not only one, but three of these Swordslaves had made their appearance.

‘They used their heads. Swordslaves are existences akin to tools,

so it is easier for the Summoning Palace to overlook them, they can also conveniently be thrown away after.'

Under the protection of the Swordslaves, Sungchul gained a representative match participation slot. Jungshik brought along a small number of his men to approach Sungchul as though he had been waiting for Sungchul to step down.

"Hey, what kind of a fuck are you?"

He looked expressionless, but an inexplicable sense of wrath leaked out of his body. He was glaring at him with a murderous aura that would normally be difficult to even keep eye contact with, yet Sungchul didn't fidget. Instead, he pointed over his shoulder and quietly said.

"Don't bark at me. Directly go talk to the people involved."

Sungchul's finger pointed at the Swordslaves that were standing conspicuously under the arena.

Jungshik peered over towards the Swordslaves, then backed away from Sungchul with his men. The selection match continued onwards.

Jungshik's faction's vigor was surely shriveled. The summoned who were affiliated with Hakchul's faction fought their way onto the arena, and the other preselected that were observing the situation also began to step into the selection matches. An exciting

competition unfolded, but the winners were the better trained preselected.

Jungshik P, Woojung, Sunghae, and others that followed Sungchul were obviously selected, but two more preselected who barely survived the werewolf attack also managed to pass the selection match. 20 of the 30 slots were filled within just a moment. Only 10 slots remained.

Ahmuge had not appeared yet, but there was a weird atmosphere circling the plaza. Jungshik had been gathering his men and preparing to strike against the Swordslaves.

The homunculi were spread throughout the plaza, but nothing else mattered to Jungshik. His dignity couldn't bear letting these Swordslaves go. As the leader of a group, his faction might end up disbanding if he was branded as a leader that couldn't repay the death of his men.

Jungshik pulled out his blade of swiftness and challenged a Swordslave to a fight. It was the man wearing a red devil t-shirt and a fisherman's hat.

“Let's have a go.”

“....”

Looking at Jungshik who was pulling out his blade, the Swordslave wordlessly unsheathed his sword in response.

Jungshik let out a shout before charging towards the Swordslave.

Clang!

The swords met in the air and sparks flew. When their swords met, Jungshik felt that his opponent's strength was no greater than his own. He might even be stronger. Jungshik felt encouraged and unleashed a torrent of continuous blows. The blade of swiftness moved blindingly as it targeted several of the Swordslave's vital points. However, he hit a limit as his attacks were pitifully simple and were also completely blocked by the Swordslave's defenses.

Jungshik had been on the offensive until now, but the roles were suddenly reversed. It was at this moment when he realized that there was a difference in skill between them which couldn't be overcome by merely relying on strength. Rusted and gouged in many places, the bloody sword of the Sword Slave came stabbing towards his chest. Jungshik had no way of blocking it.

“Hahaha! Shit!”

At that moment, a miracle occurred. The blade that looked to pierce his ribs at any time was blocked by another sword.

It was Ahmuge.

She didn't bother looking back as she coldly spoke.

“Look carefully at their eyes. They aren’t human.”

“.....”

It was then that Jungshik finally saw the Swordslave’s eyes under the Fishermen’s hat. It was like a ghost’s eyes, white with no iris.

‘W-what the... this bastard... isn’t human?!’

Jungshik felt a chill, and his body tensed up; the Swordslave left and returned to its original place.

It was almost obvious that Ahmuge would be the next candidate. The other summoned had clearly seen her skills and didn’t even dare to challenge her.

“Are there no challengers? I’ll count to 30 then!”

The new Drill Sergeant’s countdown started. Ahmuge looked around expressionlessly, when she discovered Sungchul looking at her from below she gave a little wave. 10 Seconds before the countdown ended, three men in rags climbed onto the arena; They were the Sword Slaves.

Chapter 28 – Selection Match (3)

‘What a strange feeling.’

A wrinkle formed between Sungchul’s eyes. He could guess who was behind the Swordslaves the moment they arrived to support him. Krill Regall; when he had given him the Bracelet of Alias, he had urged Sungchul not to be surprised if something unexpected happened. He must have been talking about the appearance of the Swordslaves. What didn’t add up was why the Swordslaves would aim at Ahmuge.

‘To hunt a Reincarnate in such a public place? Why use a nobody like Krill Regall for that?’

The Reincarnate Hunt was the deepest of secrets enjoyed by only the most powerful of figures. The directors of the Hunt were all famous masters that had the complete trust of those powers. There was no way that such a no-name magician would be used for such an important task.

‘Something is wrong. Was I mistaken?’

There was no way to know for sure. But there was a possibility where someone could have placed a kill order on the person who had picked up a certain staff. He decided to step back from the situation and continue observing the arena. The Swordslaves simultaneously pulled out their blades.

Shnnng-

Disgusting blades which hadn't been properly maintained shone in the reflection of the sun. Ahmuge retreated and spoke to the newly appointed Drill Sergeant.

“Isn't the Selection Match a one vs one battle?”

The Drill Sergeant was loudly and busily chewing on some candy.

“It is time for some snacks. There will be a chance to talk after snack time.”

It was deliberate ignorance. Ahmuge smiled bitterly and tried to step down from the arena, but the Drill Sergeant spoke revealing his saw-like teeth, as though he'd been waiting for this exact moment.

“Anyone who steps down after rising to the stage will be disqualified! 30 consecutive penalty battles will be given to all who are disqualified!”

These words felt like a death sentence to Ahmuge.

‘Is this perhaps...?’

Pessimistic speculations were teeming in her mind. It had to be a trap. It wasn't something a newbie summoned had cooked up either, but something prepared for her by external forces.

Stomp. Stomp.

The Swordslaves drew closer. She pulled out the Spirit Wolf Staff and summoned the two Spirit Wolves; they protectively drew together in front of her. Holding a staff in one hand and a sword in the other, she watched with cold eyes as the Swordslaves closed in.

One of the Swordslaves dove forward.

“Krrr!”

The Spirit Wolves bared their teeth as they charged towards the Swordslave. He stopped and backed up to where the other Swordslaves were, slaying the wolves without difficulty.

It wasn't an intentional cooperation, but something which occurred coincidentally. The audience cheered, but Ahmuge began chewing her lips while regretting her failed tactic.

‘I was too impatient. There's still a 3-minute cooldown before I can summon the wolves again...’

The summoned beasts that were supposed to guard the front had been slain all too easily. She only had her sword to attack with, but her opponents were much too tricky for her to rely on that. Swordslaves lacked in any form of personality and couldn't be negotiated with or outwitted. The only way to defeat the Swordslaves was by overpowering them, but Ahmuge lacked the

required strength.

Shik! Shik!

The Swordslaves lunged at Ahmuge. A sword barely missed, but nicked her on the neck. The sharp assault was just a few inches off from leaving a hole in her neck.

“....”

Sungchul was within the audience that was overlooking this spectacle. Unlike the others, he wasn't observing the fight itself; he was instead examining the underlying motive to this chain of events.

‘They don't intend to capture her. They would've aimed at her legs or her arms if that was the case.’

At that moment, another sword came rushing at her neck. She dodged the sword once again, but it managed to catch a bit of her hair leaving a few strands fluttering behind. This resolved one of the questions he had. The Swordslaves' aim was not to capture but to kill her. But why?

Sungchul moved his attention to the audience. There must be someone relaying commands to the Swordslaves. They could be using magic or some type of primitive signal. A man soon caught his eyes. He was dressed in a worn tracksuit and a white beanie.

‘Krill Regall. That scum was ordering around the Swordslaves.’

He held a small whistle in his hand. It was a whistle used by the Slave Hunters. A fog of suspicions had been lifted from Sungchul’s mind as soon as he saw the whistle.

‘Krill is holding hands with the Slave Hunters. He must have borrowed the Swordslaves from them, but why is that guy aiming for Ahmuge? I don’t know what it could be, but one thing is clear: he’s unrelated to the Reincarnate Hunt.’

This meant that there was no reason for him to not go help Ahmuge. However, she was handling herself quite well on the arena. To most people, it would look as if she would soon be killed, but to Sungchul things seemed quite different. She was dodging the attacks by a hair’s breadth, but she wasn’t facing any real danger.

‘Should I sit back and watch her skills?’

He crossed his arms and leisurely observed the fight.

“Haaa....”

In that same moment, Ahmuge was dodging another blade. She could have parried it, but rather than engaging them she focused on maximizing the distance between them. That was because, even though the Swordslaves’ blades might be difficult to predict, their feet were still slow. After avoiding a series of attacks, Ahmuge

gained some distance and began utilizing more of the arena's available space.

The mode of this battle changed from an encirclement to a chase. The Swordslaves were slowly chasing Ahmuge as she circled further from the center of the arena. If they had independent thoughts, they might have been able to properly gather their strength and prevent her from escaping, but this proved too difficult for the Swordslaves with their muddled minds. It was thanks to this weakness that Ahmuge was able to utilize clever movements to delay their attacks. This scene was enough to elicit cries of admiration from the crowd, and the cheers for the delicate female underdog only grew louder as time passed.

Three blood-letting minutes passed under a roar of cheers. This time, Ahmuge didn't make the mistake of immediately summoning the wolves. She circled the outer limits of the arena while waiting for the Swordslaves' formation to weaken. It didn't take too long. Ahmuge allowed for some distance from the frontmost Swordslave, and he quickly broke formation to stab at her with his blade. She evaded the strike then held out her staff to call out the wolves.

“Awooooo!”

With a sudden flash of light, two Spirit Wolves appeared by her feet.

“Get him!”

Ahmuge rushed over with her wolves at the exposed Swordslave in a three-directional assault. The Swordslave mechanically tried swinging his sword to defend himself, but Ahmuge bravely pushed forward to draw all of its attention to herself. At this moment, the wolves lunged and sunk their teeth into the exposed neck and heel of the defenseless Swordslave.

Belatedly, the other Swordslaves also tried to defend him, but Ahmuge and her wolves quickly retreated while watching the critically wounded Swordslave.

“U-ugh....”

Color returned to the iris of the Swordslave.

“Mother...”

The Swordslave’s shackles were undone on the moment of its death. With his remaining strength, he stretched out his hand before slumping over. Now there were only two Swordslaves remaining.

Her breath was ragged, but her expression had a bit of leisure to it. It didn’t last very long though.

“W-what? What are these guys?”

Another group approached the stage. They were also wearing rags with hats that covered their faces. More Swordslaves. This

time five Swordslaves stepped up to the arena.

Ahmuge's face quickly grew dark.

‘It's over. There's no chance with this.’

As her mind grew dull, her body also lost its strength.

‘This wasn't why I came back... I still have a mission I need to complete!’

The difference in the level of difficulty between facing three versus facing seven opponents was incomparable. They slowly approached, seeking to overwhelm her with their numbers. The Spirit Wolves growled loudly and tried to retaliate, but they were quickly cut to shreds. There was nothing left for her other than slowly backing away and holding up her sword. She quickly approached the end of the stage.

“It is a disqualification if you step off the arena!”

Drill Sergeant taunted while he continued to chew on his candy. It was a do-or-die moment. Just then a face that she had briefly forgotten appeared before her.

‘Ah, that man! What is he doing now?’

Help came as if he was waiting for a signal. Ahmuge watched as a

man climbed into the arena. Dressed in rags sporting messy, unkempt hair, he was a man of few words, unpersonable and cold....yet having unbelievable finesse in cooking. Sungchul Kim had arrived.

“Stand behind me.”

He curtly said as he drew his sword. Ahmuge simply nodded her head and moved behind him.

The Swordslaves hesitated as Sungchul approached them. Sungchul's eyes flashed.

‘As I thought...’

The Swordslaves wouldn't attack the person wearing the bracelet. It would actually be more accurate to say that they just couldn't. This was because its wearer was someone their controllers absolutely needed to protect, but would a Swordsman who had completely lost their will ever understand such a complex situation?

Sungchul's blade flew towards a Swordsman's heart. It didn't even try dodging or defending itself. The blade easily pierced through its heart.

“U-ugh....”

This was the limit of those that have lost their will, their ability

to decide for themselves. Existences that only moved on command could never decide for themselves when one command was contradicting the other. Sungchul used that weakness to drive his blade through the heart of the Swordslave.

“U-ugh... I want to go home...”

The Swordslave, who had been struck in the heart, regained its mind before dying. The Plaza was instantly filled with whispers.

“What... How did that happen?”

“Who... is that person? Is he the leader of those bums?”

Sungchul whispered as he pulled off the bracelet on his wrist and handed it to Ahmuge.

“Wear this, and you won’t be attacked.”

He stepped off the arena after leaving behind those few words. The Drill Sergeant could not threaten Sungchul with disqualification due to not only having been qualified earlier, but also having the bracelet in his possession.

The Drill Sergeant only looked towards Krill Regall with confused eyes, but he didn’t receive any answer. The Swordslaves approached Ahmuge in confusion, but when she put on the bracelet, they froze like statues and refused to come any closer. Ahmuge pierced one of them in the heart just as Sungchul had

done before.

“Let’s go... to victory...!!”

The man wearing the red shirt fell with his blood pouring out. There was no resistance nor defiance in him. Ahmuge, who had gotten her second wind, began rapidly ‘liberating’ the Swordslaves. Three Swordslaves fell in just moments, and a very low-pitched whistle rang out.

The frozen Swordslaves fell back and stepped down from the arena. The audience that had been holding their breath while watching Ahmuge’s struggle broke out in cheers. Jungshik was not an exception.

“Wow, fuck! That was great!”

Sungchul turned towards a man hidden amongst the crowds within the chaos of cheers. He had hidden his identity with a tracksuit, but the face that was hideously smeared in panic and rage was definitely Krill’s.

Sungchul waved his hand at him. Krill grew bright red with rage and disappeared with the Swordslaves.

“Thank you.”

Ahmuge approached from behind as Sungchul watched Krill leave. She looked up to him as she returned the worn brass

bracelet.

“Really... I’m truly grateful.”

A heartfelt gratitude would have a sincerity that could not be expressed through flowery words.

“... I only kept my promise, that’s all.”

Sungchul turned his back to her and started walking away. There were too many people heading in their direction for them to talk any more personally. And there was also the message delivered by a Sky Squirrel that had drawn his interest.

[There is something we must discuss at length. Come to the Forsaken Church immediately.]

Chapter 29 – Certification (1)

“Son of a bitch...”

By now, Krill was almost entirely consumed by his anger. He couldn't help it. He had failed the important mission that his respected senior Dolorence Winterer had entrusted him with.

The slave hunters were following behind him.

“You know how hard it was to raise those Sword Slaves? You'll have to pay us back in full.”

They were greedy and filthy mongrels, but Krill had no allies more reliable than them. He pulled out two gems and handed them over to the slave hunters.

“Thank you for your patience. Come everyone, let's get this taken care of”

A very jubilant smile formed upon the slave hunter's lips. They never expected to receive enough money to live like kings in a brothel for a whole month, even after splitting it evenly. It wasn't often for slave hunters who were the bottom feeders of society to get an opportunity like this, but not everyone was so pleased.

“This isn't good.”

It was the armless slave hunter that had extended a helping hand to Krill in the past. He refused Krill's request when it was offered, but when Krill began offering it to the others, he caved in and followed. It couldn't be helped.

If he hadn't followed, his companions would have killed Krill and tossed him into the homunculi's feed.

"Messing with the summoned is strictly forbidden by palace rules. Don't act rashly."

He continued to caution Krill. Krill had first let him talk out of gratitude for the past, but even when his goal was so close, the man wouldn't shut up. The anger he had been suppressing burst out.

"Hmm? But you do it all the time. I don't think that's something a man whose very job is to turn the summoned into mindless slaves should be saying to others"

"...."

The one-armed man turned silent.

He knew very well that he had nothing to retort with. But he couldn't simply stay silent. He gave a final warning with heartfelt sincerity.

"... I am also an Airfruit alumni. I am your senior."

At this, Krill glared icily at the left-armed man.

“I don’t remember having a slave hunter as my senior.”

The left-armed man lowered his head and didn’t open his mouth anymore. They soon arrived at the forsaken cathedral. Krill couldn’t hide his joy at seeing the man he was looking for waiting there as requested.

“Hey, Mr. Sungchul.”

Krill stood in front of Sungchul with six other slave hunters by his side. Sungchul indifferently looked over at Krill and his group of slave hunters.

“Who are these people?”

“Can’t you tell, as someone who has come from the outside?”

Krill smirked.

“....”

Anyways, you seem to think the world is an easy place since you became a bit stronger. Did you think I was such a pushover?”

Krill's voice gradually grew louder. By the time he finished his question, he was practically shouting at the top of his lungs.

“Do I look like a fucking pushover to you? Huh? You smelly Asian son of a bitch!”

Some laughter spilled out of the slave hunters standing behind him.

Sungchul slowly opened his mouth.

“Are these the only people you've come with?”

It was the same firm voice, no different than before.

Krill smirked again and nodded his head.

“Of course. There's only us here.”

“Is that so?”

Sungchul replied indifferently but that only aggravated Krill even further. Getting red in the face and extremely agitated, Krill declared

“Should I inform you what we're about to do to you? I'm going to capture you with the help of my friends behind me. Then I'm

going to torture you until you beg me for death. Finally, I'm going to turn you into a slave. Though, I'm going to have to think a bit about just what kind of slave I should be turning you into."

"It is a good plan"

Sungchul was still calm.

Krill moved to one side and gestured towards the slave hunters.

"Now. Let's begin."

Each of the slave hunters held their own weapon and walked towards Sungchul. They were slave hunters now, but they used to be mages and warriors worth their salt in the past. Their battle experience and skills were on a different level. One man with a blade scar across his face spoke mockingly.

"Aren't you embarrassed? For someone from the outside with money and power to hide yourself among the summoned?"

Sungchul turned his head towards the man and replied briefly.

"Yup.."

Sungchul's form briefly shook. By the time Krill's eyes registered the visual cues, he heard a dull thud reverberate in the air in front of him.

“Ack!”

Sungchul’s fist dealt a massive blow to the slave hunter’s chin. Krill could clearly see what had happened to the slave hunter’s face after being struck so hard. The slave hunter’s face had splattered into tiny pieces.

Gasp

Sungchul didn’t stop. After disintegrating one with his fist, he pulled out his sword and slaughtered the others.

They were no match for him.

The slave hunters were dead before they even understood how they had died.

The massacre didn’t even last for 10 seconds.

“S-spare me!”

The one-armed slave hunter quickly embraced reality and fell to his knees to beg for his life. Seeing that Sungchul was still approaching, he took out a stake with a red cloth attached to it and pierced it into his heart. His eyes shook intensely, but he bit his lips and quickly spoke with a ragged breath.

“I-I swear! This... I, Christian Ashwood will not speak of what I have seen today with anyone... If this oath is broken... the cost for such a transgression shall be death... So do I swear to the God of Neutrality!”

Once the oath was completed the stake in his heart magically disappeared, and the red cloth burst into flames turning to ash.

“Ho? An oath. Clever man.”

Sungchul left him alone and headed towards Krill. Krill’s eyes grew wide in fear. Sungchul’s rough hands grabbed his face. And only when an unbearable strength transferred from Sungchul’s grip into his skull, did Krill make the smart decision.

‘I-I got into the wrong line... the real monster wasn’t Dolorence... It was this person...’

However, it was too late to regret now. Sungchul gripped harder and spoke in his usual firm voice.

“Now let’s hear it. Tell me everything from start to finish.”

Krill told him everything he knew. From the moment he saw the advertisement that had led him to the Summoning Palace to the moment he met Dolorence. He told Sungchul about how she wrapped Sanggil around her fingers and ordered Ahmuge’s death. He revealed everything that occurred within the Observation

Tower to Sungchul.

Krill trembled as he carefully looked up at Sungchul.

“I-it was all that Dolorence bitch... the red haired woman’s scheme. I just did as I was told.”

“Is that so?”

“Of course. If you let me live, I’ll pry Dolorence out and present her to you. I swear by my name.”

“I don’t need help from someone like you. She’ll show herself to me on her own in any case.”

Wham!

Sungchul’s fist struck the top of his skull. The young magician’s eyes spun in different directions, and all seven orifices spat out blood before he finally fell over.

“Kyu Kyu...”

The Sky Squirrel stayed near its dead master, licking its master’s feet.

Sungchul gestured towards the slave hunter that was watching

the scene with fearful eyes.

“Hey.”

Sungchul gathered the corpses with the slave hunter and set them all on fire. A black smoke rose from the already burnt forsaken cathedral. Sungchul peeked over at the slave hunter as he burned the corpses. The man didn't move as he sat on the floor. He seemed to have lost all strength after watching such a murderous spectacle. However, Sungchul didn't care to kill him. He was no longer in the position to tell anyone about this scene even if he was allowed to live out the rest of his life. Even if he did try to tell anyone the truth, the oath would immediately activate, and he'd be sent to cross the river Styx. That was the power held by this oath.

However, to be able to perform the oath so brazenly in that kind of situation; A smile formed on Sungchul's lips. More than anything, he wanted to praise this man's decisiveness and quick thinking. As he continued to think to himself, the slave hunter approached him and lowered his head.

“Sir Warrior, whose name I do not know.”

Sungchul calmly raised his head and looked at the man. He looked to be in his mid-30s. He also had relatively intelligent eyes.

“What did you want with me?”

“I have no way of knowing who Sir Warrior is or where Sir Warrior came from, but I have seen it. Sir Warrior is definitely not a normal person.”

“Speak briefly. I have to go back to the plaza soon.”

“Will you not take me as your underling?”

“You?”

“It looks like you had some kind of deal with Krill Regall... I don't know much else, but I know I can do a lot better than a punk like Krill.”

Christian Ashford was genuinely lowering his head. He had seen it. Brock, who had been a knight of the empire, was split in two with just a single strike and Giron, who held a high-rank position in the thief's guild, had his neck twisted in just one punch. It wasn't enough to simply call this 'very strong', it was simply monstrous.

If anything, he was around the level of a Royal Army, or enough to take on a high-rank Knight's position within the Order of Iron Blood Knights. If he could tie himself to such a person, it might be enough to pull him out of his current pathetic life.

“P-please use me. I... I'll do anything.”

However, Sungchul's reaction was lukewarm.

“I don’t really need anyone. What did you do before you became a slave hunter?”

“Mage... I was a mage. I was even an Airfruit alumni. I can’t use magic now, but I know just about everything when it comes to magic.”

“A mage...”

There might be a couple of uses. A mage would know the path which lay ahead of him and would also be able to guide him along the way.

Sungchul wrapped his hand around the Sky Squirrel that was pitifully standing near the pile of flame and gave it to Christian.

“Take care of this little guy, and come find me with him during the graduation ceremony.”

He then pulled out a gem and tossed it over to Christian. This was a symbol of the faith he held towards Christian. Christian tightly held the gem in his hand and watched Sungchul leave with a mixture of fear and anticipation filling his eyes.

The selection match had ended successfully. All 30 captains had been chosen. Sungchul set out to seek the remaining memorials of

the Seven Heroes scattered across the Summoning Palace with Ahmuge, but something unexpected occurred.

They set out to find the Path of Daltanius first, but it seems as if all of the memorials, starting with this one, had disappeared. There was only a fallen pillar in place of the most anticipated memorial of the leader the Seven Heroes, Desfort, and nothing reacted to their presence.

“How could this be... all of them were taken. I’m not sure what happened but...”

It looked as though Sungchul wasn’t overly concerned. Other than Desfort, the remaining Seven Heroes were all warriors. Sungchul, who had reached the peak of warriors, didn’t have much to gain from them. He simply wanted to check out their faces.

While blankly looking at the fallen pillar, he gazed over at Ahmuge and spoke.

“Isn’t there one last place left?”

“Ah... yes. There’s still that Hero left.”

The hero that Ahmuge and Sungchul were referring to was called White Shadow. There weren’t any records of him other than some reference to him being an assassin, but on the other hand, there were also some alarming legends which had been passed down. It was a rumored that the assassin, who didn’t like the thought of

records being left of him, had killed all the historians and burned their books.

Thankfully, the memorial of White Shadow still remained. Deep in the woods lay a corpse with a slit throat that gave proof that the memorial of White Shadow was still there. However, Ahmuge reacted strangely. She hurriedly stopped Sungchul as he was about to start the quest.

“I’m deeply sorry... but this quest. Could I do it?”

“Tell me the reason.”

“I don’t know about the others... but I have to complete White Shadow’s objective myself. That’s the only way I can save the world.”

“I don’t think I can accept that?”

Sungchul continued to show a lukewarm reaction, so Ahmuge briefly fell into thought and responded with a resolute expression on her face.

“I am only telling this to you. Promise me that you won’t speak of this anywhere else.”

“It’s ok. I don’t have any friends to tell.”

“You don’t... have friends?”

Sungchul nodded.

“So... that’s the case.”

“So keep talking.”

Ahmuge settled down again and spoke with a calm voice.

“I don’t know if you’ll believe me... but I came from the future.”

Sungchul’s eyes flashed with curiosity. He knew that she was a Reincarnate, but for her to speak of it herself. It must have taken an immense amount of resolution. This by itself showed just how much she valued White Shadow’s objective.

“That means you’re a Reincarnate.?”

She nodded.

“My real name is Sujin Lee. I came from 10 years in the future. It’s up to you whether you believe me.”

Sujin Lee, it was a pretty name. Sungchul thought idly as he threw out a blunt question.

“Why did you return from the future to this hellish Summoning Palace?”

“I want to save the world from a calamity of extinction.”

Sujin spoke without hesitation. There was not a single trace of trickery or falsehood. It was an utterance filled with confidence that could only come with an unwavering conviction. Sungchul was intrigued by her words.

‘I suppose this means that the world wouldn’t be saved by my efforts. Does this mean that I failed?’

It was disappointing news, but the future that Reincarnates spoke of wasn’t that reliable either. Whatever future they had been in could always be changed or overturned, after all, anyone would be curious about what the future holds. Sungchul asked Sujin another question while not really expecting much.

“From what? It isn’t the Seven Heroes is it?”

He at least didn’t want to hear that the cause was the Seven Heroes. If the world had fallen to such an opponent, it would invalidate his efforts to obtain strength after turning the world against him.

Sujin carefully looked up and replied after a moment.

“We overcame the second calamity, and the third.”

Sungchul found himself unintentionally sighing in relief.

‘So I managed to bash Sajators’ head in at least...’

But, Sujin hadn’t finished speaking.

“But we ultimately faced a great calamity that couldn’t even be compared to the Seven Heroes...”

Sungchul felt an anxiety that made all the hairs on his body stand on end. He didn’t know why, but an unimaginably ominous feeling, which made his body shrivel, was enveloping him like a blaze.

“That... great calamity... what are you talking about?”

As he felt anxious and feeble, Sujin finished speaking.

“... The enemy of the world, Sungchul Kim.”

“....?!”

Sungchul’s eyes flared. Seeing his aggressive response, Sujin put on a bitter smile and added a few words of comfort.

“Ah... don’t misunderstand. It is a different person. Your face

and body are completely different.”

However, Sungchul’s face didn’t look any brighter. The enemy of the world that she spoke of could only be himself.

‘I... destroy the world...? How... That can’t be true!’

“Why are you standing there so blankly?”

Sujin tried to start the conversation again, but Sungchul simply shook his head.

“No, it’s nothing.”

He muttered to himself under his breath as he closed his eyes. Under the darkness of his eyelids, he recalled the face of the precious existence which he had to protect.

‘I will not be corrupted.’

Chapter 30 – Certification (2)

The future a Reincarnate has come from is never set in stone. There is always a possibility that those living in the present make enough difference in the choices they are given that the future the reincarnate foretells never comes to pass. And despite it all, Ahmuge's words were enough to put Sungchul in a deep state of shock. Haunted by insomnia and filled with doubts, Sungchul spent several days deep inside the forest without moving.

‘I... will destroy the world...?’

It was nonsensical. Who was the one to rise to the task at a time when those in power had simply prolonged the calamity and left their burdens onto the next generation? It was Sungchul. How much had he given up for the sake of saving the world since that moment? He had lost his best friend and also all of the reputation he had built. He had turned the world against him in order to gain strength. Wasn't it all for the purpose of saving the world that he was now hiding inside the Summoning Palace and pretending to be a newbie?

Fortunately, the confusion didn't last long. He was a man with conviction stronger than steel. The doubts which had been haunting him like a malicious ghost washed away with the sound of the starting horn for the rank match.

“Now! Now! Humans. It is now time for the final trial! Everyone did well for Blanche Plaza so far. Now, go through that door towards the Central Plaza!”

The summoned headed towards the Central Plaza under the guidance of the homunculi.

“Where have you been?”

Sujin found Sungchul and began talking.

“It’s none of your business.”

Sungchul spoke bluntly and made some distance between them. It had to be this way. Sujin was an existence from a future that shouldn’t exist. The fact that she existed in this world made him feel uncomfortable.

“....”

Sujin didn’t continue the conversation but still remained around him.

There were already hundreds of people from the other plazas crowding within the Central Plaza. There were two circular arenas, the majority of homunculi were standing around them and gathered all of the people there.

“Those that were nominated as representatives, please get up here now.”

30 people, including Sungchul, walked up to the arena.

“Unpredictable! Exciting! Humans that are going through the penalty game of predicting all 30 consecutive winners step this way!”

Those that weren't included as representatives were taken to a place where the ground was partitioned into three, where someone had etched an X and an O using a stone in two of the slots and the third was left blank.

Those people without the courage to fight on their own, those who had stood behind others to survive thus far, and those who were too weak all looked around nervously at their surroundings as they each stepped onto their designated area. One man stepped forward and shouted out amidst the silence.

“Everyone, let's give it our all. No matter how dangerous the situation, remaining calm will reveal a way out!”

It was Hakchul. He couldn't become a representative in the end. The latter half of the selection match was indescribably competitive among those with mediocre strength. Of the 150 casualties that had occurred over the course of the selection process, about 80% were a result of the fights for the last five available spots. Hakchul had stepped up to the arena but quickly retreated due to how fierce the fighting had become. It was a secret known only to Hakchul that he had, in fact, went up to the stage three times as the homunculus in charge had overlooked him. However, a man who failed three times was never meant to succeed.

“Everyone! Let’s work together and get through this trial! Nothing is impossible if we work with our collective wisdom!”

The gong sounded, marking the beginning of the rank matches as Hakchul’s words of inspiration began to fade away.

“First representatives to the front!”

Each of the first representatives from the Crimson and Blanche Arenas stood facing one another. Blanche Plaza’s first representative was the lucky man who had obtained a slot without contest when no one had the courage to step up. The sound of rumbling feet with hundreds of people rushing around could be heard coming from behind the two fighters.

“Now, the heart-pounding prediction of the winner is taking place! ‘O’ to predict a Blanche victory, and ‘X’ for a loss! Stand on the blank sheet if you predict a tie!”

The entire arena became noisy as people began to move about due to the order given by the amused Drill Sergeant. The audience observed the appearance of each representative standing in the arena. As it was impossible to determine who was stronger at the current moment, people could only make their judgment based on appearance. The summoned could do nothing but bet their lives on whoever looked like they would be the better fighter. Of course, there were also some that used their wits to make their bets too.

“That guy! It’s the one who became the first representative, right?”

It was Hakchul.

“That guy became a representative by pure luck, so he’ll definitely lose. Let’s all go to X! Trust me and follow me!”

Hakchul shouted as he headed to the X area first. Even those who had been ignoring Hakchul felt that what he said was logical. Everyone close by headed towards the X area and stimulated a herd instinct, which caused the majority of the people to go stand on the X. Soon, it became so crowded that there was not enough space to accommodate everyone on X anymore.

After a brief moment, the iron gates of the Central Plaza opened, and the homunculi dragged out a large monster. It was a 9 headed dinosaur like creature. By its size alone, it was much larger than a Tam Tam and fearsome beyond compare. The monster was controlled by the homunculus that was riding on its back and stood behind the humans within the victor-prediction group.

“Grrr.....”

Several people fainted at the sight of the drool wetting the floor that was coming from its massive jaw.

“A lot of people have gathered to that side. I guess they think I’m going to win?”

The number 1 representative from the Crimson Plaza was a

confident looking youth in his early-20s. He smirked towards the Blanche Plaza's number 1 representative who was frozen stiff with tension.

‘They might have picked correctly, but unfortunately, they’ve awoken my sense of mischief.’

The man who was talking nonsense to himself turned towards the Homunculus referee and spoke briefly.

“I forfeit.”

The homunculus referee looked over to the Blanche Plaza representative and spoke.

“Hey, human. Do you agree to the opponent’s surrender?”

The Blanche Plaza’s lucky guy had no reason to refuse him. He nodded his head, and the Homunculus raised the white flag.

“It is Blanche Plaza’s... victory!”

Just like that, the first rank match was over. Its name was grand, but the Representative’s match was an event similar to a bonus game. What the Summoning Plaza wanted from the summoned after the fierce combat of the fourth rank match was a person that had the courage and ambition to claim their place. The true rank matches had been completed before the selection match even began.

The 9-headed monster let out a cry as soon as the Homunculus lifted the white flag. After its fearsome cry, the monster began to stomp on and devour everyone on the X area.

“Hey, you fuck! You said that the Crimson Plaza would win!”

Those that were near Hakchul grabbed his collar and shook him, but the water had already been spilled.

“What are you going to do now? Huh!”

Hakchul looked half-insane as he sang a song.

“A B C D E F G, H I J K L M N O P, Q R S T U V W, X, Y, Z....
Haha!”

His song was cut short when he was swallowed by the monster. Several hundred survivors were either eaten by the creature or stomped on by its heavy feet meeting their ultimate tragic fate. There was only blood and corpses left on the X spot, looking as though a hurricane had blown through.

“Ara? Did my prank go too far?”

The first representative match ended like this. The next match fell into a similar rhythm, but there were more than a few that fought with their lives on the line. The rewards for this match was considerably great. It was a big deal to be able to choose your desired class transfer tome from among all of the rewards. Fierce

battles and uneventful surrenders passed by until finally, it was Sungchul's turn. He didn't even have a shred of desire to forfeit, and his opponent looked to be the same.

The tall man wielding a large knife began to taunt him.

“Looks like you got the short end of the stick if you've become my opponent.”

He released an aggressive aura as he pulled out his blade.

“But what should I do? It's a secret, but I already met the goddess of victory before stepping onto here.”

Sungchul discovered that there was a magic-induced blessing surrounding the man's body.

‘He's been plastered with buffs. It must be the redhead who's siding with him.’

Sungchul fidgeted with the bracelet before bluntly asking a question to his opponent who was laughing and showing his teeth.

“Does that goddess have red hair, perhaps?”

Surprise flickered across his opponent's eyes.

“How did you know that?”

After that question, he looked up at the Observation Tower that was beyond the palace walls. The spectators from the Order of the Iron Blood Knights that Dolorence represented were gathered within the Observation Tower linked to the Blanche Plaza. Dolorence who had been concerned by Krill’s sudden radio silence became relaxed after the man wearing the bracelet appeared.

‘That stupid son of a bitch. Where did he go? He should have contacted me if he had somewhere else to be. It’s fine that everything turned out as planned, but I’m not letting this go after I meet him.’

Beside her, Sanggil and other high-rank knights were socializing while watching the arena.

“Oh~ Is that the Knight Captain’s offspring?”

“He’s not as attractive as the rumors say but... he looks masculine.”

“Yes. Masculine.”

Sanggil, who allied with Dolorence, was sweating profusely as he continued trying to match the mood and sharply turned towards her. She did not flinch as she met his eyes and nodded. Today would progress just as they’d planned.

The gong rang out, marking the start of the match. The high-rank knights held their breath as they watched the fight, before a

roar of applause exploded from among the knights. The Knight Captain's son had skewered his opponent in the heart with just a single strike. Although it was more accurate to say that the man couldn't gauge his own strength and had ran into the waiting blade on his own accord.

“How could this be...!! He overcame this opponent —who had at least three buffs including Haste, Levitation, and Peerless— in such a simple manner...”

“I can't believe it. That calm and calculative nature. Taking action without hesitation. It feels as though I'm watching the Iron Blood Knight's Captain's rookie summoned days.”

The faces of Dolorence and Sanggil grew sour at the cheer that filled the Observation Tower. Sanggil took a moment to approach Dolorence and confronted her in a hushed voice.

“What happened, Mage?”

Sanggil glared at her as though he could kill her on the spot.

Dolorence felt her heart drop but refused to let it show.

“I'll take care of it. Before that man meets his next opponent.”

“No... do you have any idea what you're saying right now...”

At that moment, two high-rank knights approached Sanggil. His

face was wrinkled in anger, but he smiled when he turned to face his companions.

“Hey, Congrats Sanggil. You’re sure to be promoted for handling such a difficult job. With this, you might be the only major figure in our Iron Blood Knight’s Order to ever follow the will of the Founder.”

“Ah... well, it was nothing much.”

Sanggil wiped his forehead as he replied. Dolorence took that moment to lightly slip out of the Observation Tower.

Sanggil saw Dolorence running off like a stray cat and thought to himself.

‘It turned out like this because I trusted a mage’s promise. I should have done this by myself from the start.’

Sanggil excused himself from the crowd and also slipped out of the Observation Tower. As he stepped out, the plaza exploded in cheers. It was because another representative had won a life-risking battle. It was Sujin. She pointed her sword at the kneeling enemy.

“I-I lost.”

The opponent proclaimed her surrender and Sujin nodded to accept it. Her blade which had absorbed White Ghost’s vision was a degree sharper than before, and it was also at an incomparable level within the Summoning Palace. Sujin, who had easily earned her victory, headed over towards Sungchul standing below the arena.

“What are you up to?”

She didn't expect an answer. Sungchul peeked over to her before speaking in a low voice.

“It's as you can see.”

He was counting his Palace Tokens one-by-one and placing them inside his pocket. There were 53 tokens in total which meant that he had exceeded his goal.

“That's great. It also looks like your mood has improved somewhat.”

Sujin smiled brightly towards Sungchul, but he didn't respond.

“Did I do something wrong?”

She took the opportunity to carefully ask with a bit of emotion mixed in, but he simply shook his head.

“No. It's just that I want to be alone.”

Sungchul got up after he placed all of the Tokens in his pocket.

“It is time.”

Soon, a bell loud enough to shake the whole arena rang out.

The bell announced the end of all the trials.

Chapter 31 – Certification (3)

“Now, everyone go grab your class transfer tomes and move to the altar.”

In total there were 83 summoned who had completed the trial. The number of graduates was higher than average, but considering that 2418 people were summoned during the mass summoning ritual, it couldn't be regarded as a large number.

Sungchul looked at the class transfer tome he was holding. It was the Tome of Echo Mage. The moment had arrived for him to absorb the power of one of the Seven heroes' hidden tome. He followed the other summoned up to the altar while holding the Tome of Echo Mage in his hand.

The Summoning Palace's affiliate mages, wearing thick hoods that covered their faces, surrounded the altar in an orderly line and started chanting an incantation using an incomprehensible language. Runes that were engraved throughout the altar gave off a blue luminescence which shot up into the sky between the summoned who were standing above them creating pillars of light.

Their surroundings quickly grew dim during this time. It was as though the sun had been swallowed by something unseen, the Summoning Palace was covered in sudden darkness. The summoned were surprised at the change, Sungchul however, unflinchingly looked up towards the sky. The eclipse was in progress.

Class distribution had to occur during a full eclipse. This eclipse, which occurred at a regular interval, was the optimal moment for a Mass Class Distribution. The moment the sun was completely obscured by the moon, the chanting of the magicians grew louder, and a message appeared before Sungchul.

[Open the Class Transfer Tome.]

Sungchul opened the Echo Mage’s Tome. A pillar of light that was positioned on the altar drew closer towards Sungchul and surrounded him in its light. Several tens of thousands of letters written inside the tome separated from its pages and floated within the light before gathering on his body.

[You have been bestowed with the Blessing of the Echo Mage.]

[Congratulations! Legendary Class: Echo Mage has been acquired!]

[Reward: Class – Echo Mage acquired]

Sungchul immediately opened his class and stats screen.

[Stats]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Stamina 801 Magic Power 32

Intuition 25 Magic Resist 621

Resolve 502 Charisma 18

Luck 18

[Class]

Main Class – Primordial Warrior (Mythic)

Sub Class – Echo Mage (Legendary)

Sub Class – High Grade Chef (Rare)

Sub Class – Alchemist (Rare)

He finally managed to get a hold of the Echo Mage class. Even in his status screen everything that pertained to magic had increased, even resolve had increased by a minuscule amount of one. He had managed to fulfill all of his goals in coming here.

Sungchul recalled the Devil of the Demon Realm.

‘I don’t think it will take much longer.’

The summoned looked at their changed status as the ritual came to an end and light returned to the world. The homunculi, who numbered within several hundreds, all took off their hats to show proper respect and etiquette towards these humans.

“Now! Now! Humans! You have done well! We, homunculi, show proper respect to the humans who managed to survive until this day!”

Within this exciting atmosphere, the summoned finally experienced the end of this impossibly long and hellish journey. It was during this moment that the massive Palace gates on the south side began to open.

[Congratulations on graduating from the Summoning Palace.]

[You have surpassed all of the trials of the Summoning Palace and have proven your ability to survive this world.]

All the survivors saw the same message appear before their eyes. There were some with tears and others with wide smiles. Each had their own reactions, but one thing was clear: They got through this hell without dying.

The summoned headed towards the open gates of the Summoning Palace with their expectations and burdens weighing on their hearts.

Beyond the Palace gates lay a wide expanse of grassland, and a shining city shimmering in a golden light was set before them like a beautiful painting.

“Where are you planning to go now?”

Sujin approached Sungchul as she asked.

“....”

He didn't answer her. Sujin's eyes flashed with disappointment, but she briefly said her goodbyes towards his back as he moved away.

“We'll meet again as fate allows it.”

After leaving those words, Sujin turned and headed east.

A sigh escaped Sungchul's mouth. He was filled with regret and doubts about whether he should inquire about his future. Whether he should ask her for the reason he had fallen or what kind of events were awaiting him. However, he eventually overcame the sweet temptation.

‘The future you have seen won't come to pass.’

Corruption begins with but a tiny seed of doubt. It was right to cut out the roots, which would slowly consume him and hinder his ability to complete everything that needed to be done; because that was just an uncertain future. He trusted himself. There were no doubts in his mind regarding that.

There was also another reason for why he needed to separate himself from Sujin. It was because a certain redheaded female mage was waiting for him behind a fallen stone pillar.

“Hello, Mr. Cute Recruit.”

Dolorence spoke with a hint of playfulness in her voice.

“Do you mind talking with me for a bit?”

Sungchul nodded, and Dolorence led him towards the outer edge of a forest.

“Thank you for being so cooperative.”

She revealed her true nature once they arrived at a location far enough from prying eyes.

“I’ll at least send you off painlessly.”

Dolorence conjured an icy storm which roared fiercely from her palms as soon as the words left her mouth. Once she extended her hands, the icy storm grew explosively and consumed Sungchul. After the storm passed, only a pillar of ice in the vague shape of a human remained.

“I do feel bad, but what can I do? This is my job after all.”

Dolorence adjusted her staff and stepped towards the frozen figure of Sungchul. That was so that she could smash it to pieces. When she approached his corpse, she felt an unexpected murderous aura pouring out from behind her.

‘An enemy?!’

As she began to turn, a blunt force struck her. It was powerful enough to cause her mind to go blank.

“Khuk!”

Dolorence briefly caught her breath before coughing up blood on the floor.

“Aaargh!”

She had lowered her guard. She had allowed herself to lose herself in front of such an easy prey and had unexpectedly been ambushed. But... who could it be?

Dolorence fought through the back-breaking pain and slowly turned her head. An unexpected figure stood there towering over her with an air of royalty around him.

“Y-you... why?”

The one who had ambushed her was Grand Knight Sanggil Ma. Wielding a hefty warhammer, he glared at her with murderous intent.

It was at this moment a passage from a magic-related reference book from a distant past popped into her mind.

Nothing in this world is fixed.
Everything is in constant flux.
Regardless of how quickly or slowly things change.

“You dare think you can play around with me?”

The beast that had been wrapped around her fingers had broken free and was now bearing his teeth towards her. He approached Dolorence, who no longer had enough strength to resist, and lifted his warhammer.

“S-stop!”

Dolorence, who had realized what he was about to do, could only flail her arms and legs while shouting pitifully, but it was all meaningless. Sanggil crushed her arms and legs one after the other. She shrieked in pain each time, but the hatred never left her eyes.

“I will curse you... Sanggil Ma!!”

“Do what you want to, mage.”

Sanggil stomped on her head with his military boots after mercilessly crushing her limbs. Her face was then shoved into the ground.

With his foot still on her head, Sanggil pulled out a pipe and began to smoke as he talked to himself and held a smug smile on his face.

“I should have done this from the start. It’s just that I’m too soft at times. Isn’t that right, mage?”

He gradually added strength to his foot as he continued speaking. Dolorence screamed, but her face had been buried in the earth.

Sanggil leisurely puffed some smoke as he looked over at the frozen Sungchul.

“Is this that brat Ahram’s standin? It looks like he had some luck on his side.”

Sanggil casually booted Dolorence’s head before heading towards Sungchul and looked over his frozen form.

“Quite a pity, but this is the kind of place Other World is. This kind of helpless situation happens so regularly here.”

Sanggil lifted his warhammer once again, seeking to finish what Dolorence started, but as he begun his swing, an ironic voice spilled out from the front.

“That’s what I think as well.”

Sanggil's eyes grew wide. In the next moment, the ice shattered and a rough hand gripped around his neck.

Struggling for breath

Sanggil's feet were lifted into the air and began flailing about helplessly. His eyes filled with terror on seeing the monstrous person that had broken out of the ice.

'W-What is this? This fucker...'

It was unimaginable. The Grand Knight, who had reached the qualities of a peak human and whose strength surpassed 300, was being oppressed so easily. He tried to break free of the grip on his neck using all of his strength, but it was pointless.

"Kuuuh..."

The mysterious man he saw through his fading vision was touching his face. His bones and muscles were making grotesque noises as they were being adjusted. It was at this moment that Sanggil came to a terrible realization.

'C-could it be?!'

When he finally saw the monster's face, he started panicking letting out an incoherent scream.

“W-World’s E-enemy, K-kim!!”

Crack~

Sungchul’s grip literally pulverized Sanggil’s throat. The Grand Knight, who was still in the air, fell limp and a mixture of feces and urine came spilling out from his shining armor.

Sungchul tied a noose around Sanggil’s neck then hung him from a tree, he then headed over to the broken limbed redheaded mage who lay awaiting death.

“You sure love pranks.”

Dolorence spat out the dirt in her mouth and looked at the person that was looking down at her.

‘Who...?’

There was no way a nobody like Dolorence would recognize Sungchul’s face. He stood over her and spoke quietly.

“But you were unlucky.”

A large hammer materialized in Sungchul’s hands. It was the legendary warhammer forged by tempering the sky into a weapon, Fal Garaz. A forgotten name formed in her mind as soon as she saw this legendary weapon.

‘Could it be... that this person is...!!’

Wham!

A refreshing sound wave rang out from the forest. Sungchul left the forest, leaving behind the Bracelet of Alibi in front of the splattered remains of Dolorence’s skull.

Sporadic groups of summoned could be seen walking through the field along a burned-out road that headed towards the golden city.

‘What should I do now?’

He had managed to get hold of a mage class, but it was just another beginning. He was familiar with how to deal with mages, but he didn’t know as much about magic itself. One had to enter a School of Magic or a guild to properly learn about magic from its foundations, but he had a curse that didn’t bode well with that situation.

“Status Screen: Curses”

Sungchul brought up a screen showing the curses that had been cast on him. His eyes were filled with many words.

[Curses]

Final Declaration of Grand Mage Balzark

(Intuition -10)

...

Adelwight of the Haunted Forest's Common Curse

(-5 Strength / Erectile Dysfunction)

Enemy of the Kingdom

(Faction: Nemesis of Human Kingdom, Blank Check Reward)

...

Enemy of the Coalition of Mages

(Faction: Nemesis of Coalition of Mages and affiliated guilds)

The immediate problem within the screen was the curse which made him the enemy of the Coalition of Mages. The Coalition of Mage Guild was an alliance formed between every guild, school, and military organizations only excluding wandering or exiled mages. This was the kind of organization he had been declared an enemy of.

He might be able to hide his identity with Deceiver's Veil, but it was another matter to enter a guild or a school with magicians who were naturally suspicious and prone to deception themselves.

“ ... ”

As he briefly contemplated on a plan, a familiar friend lingered

around his feet.

“Kyu Kyu!”

It was Krill’s orphaned Sky Squirrel. Sungchul held out his hand for the Sky Squirrel to climb onto his shoulder.

“There you are!”

Further north of the road, a man with a prosthetic limb wearing a dog-hide robe smiled brightly as he walked over. It was the Slave Hunter, Christian Ashwood.

Sungchul looked over the slave hunter without much thought as a serene smile suddenly formed on his lips. He had only now recalled Christian’s former profession.

Chapter 32 – Admission (1)

“You wish to learn magic?”

Christian looked at Sungchul with a surprised expression. Sungchul nodded as he scooped out some red pepper and soy paste from the clay pot he had taken from his soul storage. He then mixed a whole ladle worth of sauce into the boiling pot.

“I want to learn magic. Using the identity of a newbie.”

“I-I... see.”

Christian was quick to catch on; He knew figures of infamy like Sungchul didn't appreciate being asked questions. He also realized that a unique opportunity had presented itself for him to prove his worth.

“There are a lot of magic guilds and academies inside Golden City, but there aren't many places which can compare to Airfruit Magic Academy.

“I've heard of Airfruit Magic Academy.”

And killed many of its alumni.

Sungchul added some soybean paste into the boiling water containing some of the river minnows, then tasted the seasoning

using a spoon.

“Mmm. It’s good.”

He had also gathered vegetables from a nearby farm and added them into the pot that was on top of a fire. Next to it was a stone cauldron, which was releasing a crisp aroma while being heated by the fire. Christian was a little shocked as Sungchul continued cooking.

‘I wonder what kind of a person is he? Filling a precious Soul Storage with food... precious and rare ingredients that aren’t so readily found anywhere.’

The Soul Storage was a personal storage which was earned through a soul contract; any item could be pulled in and out from it at any time. However, as with most soul contracts, obtaining soul storage was a difficult task and required an enormous sum of money. The most common variety, Soul Storage (Common), had 10 slots and cost as much as a property located in the inner city. It wasn’t necessary to explain how valuable such a storage space was. Yet this mysterious man was using such a precious soul storage for storing food. He hadn’t seen or heard of someone doing the same. It left Christian speechless.

Sungchul pulled out another consumable from his soul storage – an emerald wine bottle and a shot glass. He poured himself a shot and tossed it back whole.

“Kha!”

He put down his shot glass and vigorously mixed the boiling Spicy Stew with the fluffy rice he had prepared into the stone cauldron before giving it a taste.

“....”

Sungchul closed his eyes, enamored in the taste of his own cooking.

[This Food's Score is... 24 points]

It was a below ‘average score’, but he didn’t mind. He didn’t know how the Chef Class’s scoring system worked, but it would frequently give a low score to traditional Korean cuisines. Especially something like pickled shrimp, which never received a score that was higher than 10 no matter how tastefully he had prepared it.

‘I don’t know on whose tastes the Chef Class’s scoring system is based on, but he or she has the preferences of a child.’

He cleaned out his bowl of rice along with the distilled drink in his green bottle before speaking to Christian who had been spacing out.

“I’d heard that it’s tricky to get into Airfruit. Is that true?”

“Yes... It is a bit tricky to get admitted. You have to be young and dressed properly. Also, they weigh the recommendation of the referrer quite heavily.”

“And the exam?”

“They do give an exam, but it doesn’t mean much.”

“Is that right?”

Sungchul wasn’t young, and he was dressed quite poorly. He also didn’t have someone to give him a recommendation.

“Is there no other place? I want somewhere easy to get into that teaches a lot of magic, and also guarantees fast growth.”

When Sungchul asked again, Christian replied confidently with his plan.

“There is nowhere within Golden City that is comparable to Airfruit. It is easy enough to lie about your age, and your appearance could be sorted out by giving your hair a good comb. The most important part is the recommendation, but I am prepared to find someone for you.”

Christian pulled out a gem from his clothes and smiled. The gem was the same one Sungchul had given him as a sign of trust.

“With a gem of this quality, it should be a piece of cake to prepare a recommendation. I am personally acquainted with a professor who is in charge of admissions. I’ll try leveraging him with this gem.”

Christian spoke with a confident smile.

After hearing his spiel, Sungchul pulled out another small pouch. A pleasant clinking sound could be heard coming from within.

Christian briefly looked into the pouch and swallowed loudly at its contents. It was filled with gold coins with 99.9% purity.

“Use it.”

“T-this is too much. A single gem would be enough, but this kind of fortune...”

Sungchul rose from his seat.

“I’ll head over to Golden City first. When can I expect results?”

“With this much, I should be able to get it done in no time at all. I will prepare a report by this evening.”

“Oh yea? I’ll be below the Clock Tower when the sun sets. Give me a progress report then.

“I-I understand.”

“Do the dishes too. Make sure to scrub down the pots.”

Sungchul left his empty dishes with Christian then headed towards the city that was lit with golden lights.

Golden City

It was an independent city, free from any external faction's grip, and was also a gathering point for adventurers, which meant that it was the ideal starting point for all rookie summoned to begin their journey at. A festival was being held within the Golden City in honor of the newly graduated rookies within the Summoning Palace that have overcome all of their trials. The scattered few that entered the city were greeted at the entrance by a welcoming crowd.

“For the new bloods of Other World!”

“Over here. To the Other World, we welcome you.”

Women wearing garlands carrying beautiful smiles on their faces guided the summoned over towards the plaza. The summoned, who were completely oblivious to the proceedings, were led by the hands of the city folk to the plaza to receive a surprising grand

welcome in the middle of an audience.

Food and alcohol were provided to the summoned while a gaudy music and dances were being performed in various places within the plaza. People called this the Celebration of Beginnings. It celebrated the memorable moment in which seedlings would arrive from the modern world to overcome the trials of the Summoning Palace and take their first steps into Other World. This event was attended by not only the citizens of the Golden City but also by people of all classes, including: adventurers, clergymen, and even figures who possessed enough power and influence to shake the Other World.

An obvious objective was the welcoming of rookie summoned to congratulate them wholeheartedly, but the real reason was to observe and recruit them. Dimitri Mediov, a retainer of the powerful Human Empire located at the center of the continent, came with that purpose in mind. He lazily watched the summoned who were raucously socializing while eating and drinking heartily.

“How is it? Anyone worthwhile?”

A middle-aged man with a flashy robe took a seat next to Dimitri and struck up a conversation. His name was Armuk Bakr. He was the Admiral of the massive Allied Battle Fleet ‘Storm’, which was one of the three most powerful forces of the northern regions. Two individuals, each holding enough of a reputation to leave others slack-jawed, had gathered here. Several people had focused their attention on them and many whispers had started spinning fantasies regarding the purpose of such gargantuan characters in coming here, but the people on whom all of this was revolving

around didn't pay them any mind.

“Meh, I don't see anyone useful.”

Dimitri swirled his wine glass while furling his brow.

“Didn't you know? the Summoning Palace stopped spitting out rough gems ever since the 'preselects' became common practice.”

Armuk nodded in agreement at Dimitri's rhetoric, but he pointed at one character. It was Jungshik Chun.

“It turns out Blanche Plaza managed to turn out one decent item. He's a rare breed that has the battle sense, ability, and the fighting spirit.”

“So what? He's already taken by the Ancient Kingdom. They'll probably take him away after the festival ends to eat some dust with them in that worn down palace.”

“Probably right, but did you know...?”

Armuk broke into a knowing smile and tried his luck. Dimitri tipped his glass in indifference, but Armuk's last few words had managed to pique his curiosity.

“They say the Memorials of the Seven Heroes has disappeared. Not just one, but three of them.”

“That can’t be true. Weren’t the remaining memorials determined to be impossible to complete after numerous attempts that were made through several thousands of years?”

Dimitri’s body shivered at the memory of Vestiare’s Trial.

‘It was traumatic to look into that crazy woman’s insanity. No way any sane person could have gotten through it. Yup. No way.’

However, Armuk looked to be telling the truth.

“That used to be the case.”

He was clearly speaking in the past tense.

“....”

Dimitri stared blankly at the empty ground before taking a swig from his wine glass.

“Is that really true?”

“Why would I lie?”

Dimitri’s eyes turned back to the rookie summoned who were now standing there and enjoying the festival.

“So you’re saying that among the summoned gathered here, there are three individuals that managed to obtain the secret tomes of the Seven Heroes? Someone who even managed to watch Vestiare’s horrifying nightmare...”

“It could be just one. We can’t ignore the possibility of it being a reincarnate.”

“A reincarnate...”

Like the others in power, Dimitri did not think highly of reincarnates. It was an infallible rule of reality that those who failed once, would continue to fail. Armuk observed his expressions and continued to speak.

“And... there’s another rumor, saying that one of the rookie summoned didn’t visit the Golden City and instead chose to disappear into the Eastern Wastelands. This one had a relatively good result in the Summoning Palace too. Isn’t this a typical pattern for reincarnates?”

“It can’t be a reincarnate. The Seven Heroes aren’t so generous as to accept those pathetic bastards who have already failed once. Even if it was a reincarnate, they couldn’t have gone far. The Hunters from the religious order wouldn’t leave them alone.”

Dimitri lightly shook his head and looked over at a woman. She was quite a beautiful Asian woman. He called a servant to confirm her name.

“She says her name is Sunghae Bae. A niece of a High Knight of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights.”

His lips curled into a smile after hearing the name of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights.

“The Order of the Iron Blood Knights? I thought they were bygones. I guess they managed to scrounge up some money to grease up the Summoning Palace.”

He lost interest and looked over to another person.

‘What’s that? Is he trying to be some kind of a fucking bum?.’

There was a shabby man wearing drenched military fatigues and a pair of jeans. Dimitri pointed at him and made a joke.

“That guy looks like he rolled around the Summoning Palace by himself for 10 years. Look at his clothes.”

“Now that I look at it, his clothes look familiar. Just wait a bit.”

Armuk suddenly clenched his fist. A blue flame appeared and twirled around his fists before a single book popped out. He turned the pages, patiently skimming through it before letting out a shallow sigh.

“It’s some nobody, but his name is quite unsettling.”

“What’s his name?”

“It is a name I should not speak out loud. He has the same name as the Enemy of the World.”

“Ha! That’s one hell of a scary name, but his looks don’t seem to match. And his physique also doesn’t look too impressive?”

“It could be someone with the same name. There are plenty of Koreans with Kim as their first name.”

“Shall we check out our ‘Mr. World’s Enemy’s’ stats?”

Dimitri’s eyes lit up.

Several miniature magic runes appeared in his eyes that spun like a wheel before they relayed the information he wanted in front of him.

[Kim Sungchul’s Stats & Class]

[Stats]

Strength 24 Dexterity 25

Stamina 26 Magic Power 32

Intuition 25 Magic Resist 21

Resolve 18 Charisma 18

Luck 18

[Class]

Main Class – Magician (Common)

Sub Class – Alchemist (Rare)

A mocking laughter spilled out of Dimtri's mouth.

“Only his name is Kim Sungchul. There's no way for that guy to come to this place. The entire military force of Other World would be deployed if he were to appear anywhere.”

The man in the shabby field jacket, who was taking sips of alcohol with a blank expression, did not show any sign of being aware of the powerful men that were watching him.

After the festival was over, He waited for his guest under the massive clock tower which bore the city's time. He didn't need to wait for long.

“Sir Warrior.”

Christian Ashwood. The man, who had changed from the dog hide robe to a shimmering black robe, arrived with a face filled with shame.

“The results?”

“I have secured your admission. Even though it cost half of your gold. However...”

His words trailed off, causing Sungchul to sternly burst out.

“Speak.”

“There is a bad rumor spreading across the academy.”

“What kind of rumor?”

Christian deeply gulped before replying.

“The Followers of Calamity. People say they are active in the academy. It made my job easier because of that, but...”

“The Followers of Calamity...”

Sungchul repeated the name as though he was savoring it.

Magicians would naturally come to study the source of magic, which they called Wisdom. If this search for wisdom were to stop at a reasonable point, it would be beneficial for both the magicians themselves and to Other World as a whole. But there were some who would sacrifice everything for their research: fortune, flesh, and even their lives. Undead Mages, such as liches, were prime examples of this. However, there were those that would go even

past this point: they were the supporters of the Calamity.

These fanatics believed that the key to the true secrets of magic was held within the divinely willed Calamities. The magicians who Sungchul casually slaughtered all were these very same Followers of Calamity. Christian struggled to continue his story while wearing a pained expression.

“This was my school... but it might not be suitable to go anymore. Deaths and curses, betrayal and sinister plots plague whichever place the Followers of Calamity are active in.”

It was at this moment that he tried to carefully observe Sungchul’s face. Unexpectedly, Sungchul was smiling.

“That would fit me just fine.”

Chapter 33 – Admission (2)

Airfruit Magic Academy.

A school, which looked more like a castle in size and appearance, occupied the region at the foot of a rocky mountain which ran along the northern region of the Golden City.

“.....”

Sungchul confirmed the admissions form he had received from Christian. As was fitting for a top rank school, it used neat calligraphy and was well decorated, but the current situation facing the school was not so great. With indifferent eyes, Sungchul looked at the corpses hanging from a nearby Oaktree which was standing tall beside the school gates. A ghastly signpost written in deep red paint stood in front of it.

[Only death awaits the masses who commit heresy.]

[Heresy Inquisitor Magnus Maxima]

“Even an inquisitor is involved now.”

The situation of the school was worse than he had expected. It had allowed him to be admitted by simply greasing a few palms, but Sungchul could see the deep darkness that was looming over the entire academy.

“I’d heard from Christian.”

Head of Admissions, Robert Danton, was a scrawny and tired-looking middle-aged man. He briefly glanced over Sungchul’s documents before putting it away; he then pulled a pipe to his mouth and lit it.

“I heard you were a Summoning Palace graduate.”

“That’s right.”

“How did you know of this place? It couldn’t have been easy to find, seeing that we’re on the fringe of the Golden City.”

“I was a preselected. My backer, who I won’t name, heard about this school from the mage that was taking care of me.”

Sungchul gave a reasonable excuse. Robert, who had heard about the preselected, opened his eyes slightly and nodded.

“I see. I thought you felt different from the average rookie summoned.”

Robert sifted through his folder and pulled out Sungchul’s document then stamped a seal on its corner using a hammer-shaped stamp. After stamping it twice, Robert deeply sucked on his pipe and spoke curtly while releasing a white puff of smoke.

“With this, the admission process has been finished. Anything needed in daily life will be relayed to you by the Residence assistant that is waiting outside, so just follow according to whatever he says.”

Sungchul got up from his seat and gave him a nod. When Sungchul began to open the door, he spoke again.

“By the way, did you hear the rumors?”

Robert’s sharp voice coiled around from behind him, stopping him in his tracks..

Sungchul slightly turned his head and peered over at Robert’s face before speaking.

“I’ve heard the Followers of Calamity or something have appeared on campus.”

“You’ve come here, even after knowing that.”

Robert shuffled through his possessions before pulling out a single bright gold coin and smiled.

“Welcome to a dying school.”

What he held in his hand was the gold that Sungchul had given to

Christian.

A familiar monster awaited him outside the office.

“Hey, disciple. Please come this way.”

It was a Homunculus.

Other than the scholarly garb; none of the sickly appearance, annoying voice, and arrogant attitude had changed. Sungchul watched the homunculus walking closer to him and thought for a moment.

‘If I recall, these creatures had been created from a magician’s flask to mimic fairies..’

Homunculus were counterfeit fairies. They were similar in size and copied a fairy’s manner of speech, but compared to the loveable and cute appearance of the fairies, the homunculi were grotesque and repulsive in looks. Even their magical abilities were not comparable. In other words, they were the weaker and poorly-crafted knockoffs, but they were often used because they had quite the utility when properly trained.

“Disciple! This residence assistant is responsible for the general guidance and encouragement of your honor’s school life. This teaching assistant only speaks once so squeeze your orifices tight and pay heed to my advice!”

The Residence Assistant led him towards the Registrar's Office.

“This Registrar's Office is for choosing what school of magic you wish to learn! Hurry up and tell the staff what school of magic you wish for!”

His pace was disturbed by the unexpected intervention of the homunculus, but Sungchul knew what he needed to do from this point onwards.

‘So this is the Registrar's Office.’

There were folders filled with documents. An elven woman who was seated behind a desk, looked over in his direction with wide open eyes.

Sungchul had asked Christian about the most powerful magic one could learn in Airfruit to which he replied without hesitation

“If you're talking about magical might, the School of Pyromancy is always among the top. If you're talking about the school with the most powerful spells, that would be the school that utilizes the power of the skies: The School of Cosmomancy.”

“The School of Cosmomancy? The group that uses meteors?”

Christian nodded, however, Sungchul's response was lukewarm.

“Cosmomancy. I can definitely attest to their might, but isn’t their magic only useful during large scale war?”

The King of Devils, that Sungchul had to get rid of, was an experienced warrior as well as a crafty magician. There was no way he would allow himself to be hit by a magic like meteor that had a long casting time and a slow activation rate.

“It is commonly known that Cosmomancy is strong against large scale battles and weak against single foes, but the reality is a bit different.”

It was then that Christian put forth a different point of view.

“There are a few experienced Magicians of Cosmomancy that can call down the pure light from the Heavens to incinerate most of their foes.”

“I have never seen such a magic.”

At least among the ones Sungchul had faced, there were none that had used such a magic. Christian smiled bitterly before replying.

“It is extremely difficult to learn. The required intuition and magic power is so high that it takes five whole years to learn just the primary spells.”

“Five years?”

“Yes. By the standards of an average rookie. It isn’t easy to surpass 130 magic power and 100 intuition just through reading and meditations without having any foundation. And as you know, the effectiveness of trying to raise stats using basic tasks gives diminishing returns at higher levels.

Sungchul nodded and said,

“That is correct. It’s why people risk their lives for duels and quests; especially missions if they can manage it.”

“However, aren’t you a great and powerful warrior? If it is you, Sir Warrior, you would be able to rapidly grow through various quests and events by choosing the School of Cosmomancy as your main school and Magic Swordsmanship as your sub school.”

Christian’s plan was precise containing no room for error. He handed Sungchul a booklet with all the quests and the people related to well-known events recorded within. Once Sungchul had read the booklet, he felt that here was a man that repays their debts. A person like Krill would simply have recommended the School of Pyromancy without a second thought. However, a question formed within Sungchul.

“Why did you recommend the Magic Swordsmanship for the sub school? Couldn’t I choose something like Pyromancy or Cryomancy for my sub school?”

Christian shook his head and logically explained his reasons.

Pyromancy, Cryomancy, Metallurgy, Necromancy, Cosmomancy, and the rest which all form the 'Schools of Magic' have inherent resonance and flow accompanying them, and with each use a distinct imprint like age rings on trees would start to appear on the caster's body. This is what was referred to as a 'Magical Fingerprint'. A single magician who held two or more magical fingerprints would eventually suffer negative side effects from each print working against the other. In minor cases, they might become unable to cast top tier spells, but in some extreme cases, they might die from a volatile reaction. This is the reason for the needed prerequisite that sub schools should not create their own magical imprints. Schools such as Magic Swordsmanship, Dimensional Magic, Druidism, Divination, Induction, and Alchemy are all included in this category.

"What will you choose for your main school? Both the schools of Cryomancy and Pyromancy of our academy have a good reputation."

The elven woman handed Sungchul a catalog of all the main schools of magic. A current list of famous alumni magicians of the school was listed within the five schools of magic: Pyromancy, Cryomancy, Necromancy, Electromancy, and Cosmomancy.

'There are definitely a lot of figures within Cryomancy and Pyromancy. Some with important roles within magic guilds and some were even royal mages...'

On the contrary, there was only one name under Cosmomancy: Altugius Xero. Airfruit Magical Academy's professor. Not even a

headmaster, but just a normal professor. The weight of his name was incomparably light compared to the weight of the other alumni that were on the list. Regardless, Sungchul didn't hesitate and stepped on the path which had been decided.

“I've decided on Cosmomancy.”

“Oh my. You're going with Cosmomancy? Even if you're a Summoning Palace graduate, that still isn't an easy task.”

“....”

His will wasn't so easy to bend.

Looking at his resolute eyes, the elven woman didn't bother saying anything more and wrote something onto a document.

“What will your sub school be?”

Similarly, she presented a complete catalog of sub schools taught by Airfruit. Magic Swordsmanship, recommended by Christian, was at the top and it was followed by: Dimensional Magic, Illusory Magic, Induction, Ancient Magic, and Alchemy.

Sungchul briefly deliberated between Magic Swordsmanship and Alchemy. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say there was nothing more for him to learn regarding Magic Swordsmanship, as the Magic Swordsmen he had faced so far were nothing more than swordsmen that knew magic. He had fought with someone that

claimed to have been at the peak among them, and he had witnessed its limits first hand; thus he couldn't bring himself to feel even slightly curious about magic swordsmanship.

‘Cheap tricks might work in a close match, but it’s meaningless against absolute strength.’

He might be able to easily and plentifully gain access to quests and events that existed around the school with the choice of Magic Swordsmanship, but it didn't suit him to walk such an easy path. As long as he had been brought to the hall of learning, it would benefit him for the final battle to learn at least one single new thing.

After a lengthy deliberation, he spoke firmly to the yawning elven woman.

“I’ll go with Alchemy.”

The elven woman squinted at him and muttered quietly.

“My my, he chose unusual schools for both. Such unique preferences.”

“....”

Sungchul didn't mind it and left the office. A red-faced Residence assistant was waiting for him outside the office.

“This... human! No Disciple! It isn’t like you were playing card games in there, were you? Why did you take so long? Don’t you know what a busy homunculus this Residence Assistant is?”

He couldn’t find a reason within himself to reply to such an inferior organism. Instead, he pointed towards the front.

“Next course.”

“T-truly an arrogant disciple for a rookie. O-okay. This Residence assistant has a reputation built up through the years, so I’ll hold in my anger this one time. Follow me!”

The homunculus guided him to a narrow room with a large magician’s hat sitting within. The hat looked unsettling with eyes, nose, and mouth that appeared like a human. Sungchul knew the identity of this hat. It was the Aged Jorgbart.

It was a living hat. When it is placed on a head, the Airfruit Magic Academy’s heirloom would instantly understand the student’s aptitude and talents and determine the name of the appropriate dorm for them.

“Over there. Hurry and wear the honored hat! Once you wear the honored hat, it will recommend a suitable dorm for the disciple!”

The Residence assistant began to circle around Sungchul and tried to rush him. Sungchul sat on a chair and quietly looked

around as he placed the hat with the human face on his lap.

‘He said there was a trick to wearing this hat.’

According to Christian, The Aged Jorgbart would acknowledge your desire and repeat the desired dorm’s name if you were to shout out a dorm’s name three times inside your mind. It wasn’t clear how such a thing could happen, but he placed the Aged Jorgbart on his head. The next moment, a familiar feeling could be felt on the crown of his head. A smile appeared on his lips.

‘This... is an [incubus](#).’

incubus – dream demons as seen in Vestiare’s Nightmare chapter where they tried to cling to his head to induce various kinds of dreams.

Sungchul immediately determined the hat’s identity. They had placed an incubus within the hat and scammed people into believing that it was a talking hat. He couldn’t know what kind of tricks had been used to get an incubus to speak, but he could feel the repulsive feeling of a tentacle peering into his head. At that moment, he stopped all thoughts for a moment and clearly revealed a single, clear objective in his mind.

‘I’ll kill you...!’

Next, he thought up the image of an incubus caked in blood.

“Hiiiiii!!!”

The Talking Hat shrieked. It was closer to a beast's cry than a human scream.

“W-what happened! For the Aged Jorgbart to scream! What an unprecedented incident!”

The Residence assistant that had been watching all of this paled and began running from side to side, while Sungchul redirected his thoughts and loosened his mind before repeating a single word three times.

‘House of Recollection, House of Recollection, House of Recollection.’

When the requirements were met, the screaming incubus stopped his screams and spat out the name Sungchul desired using a mysterious voice.

“House of Recollection!”

With that, the eventful occurrence finally came to a close. The Incubus were simple and ignorant creatures. As soon as Sungchul took off the Aged Jorgbart and placed it on the chair, the hat simply continued its existence as though nothing had happened, just like an inanimate object. Sungchul approached the traumatized Residence assistant and opened his mouth.

“He said the House of Recollection?”

“I-I heard it too! But why the House... This feels like a mistake!”

The homunculus’ response was odd.

“The House of Recollection is a dorm that’s no longer used...”

“Well, what can we do. The hat already said the dorm’s name.”

Without knowing anything else, the Aged Jorgbart would obviously have priority over some homunculus regarding dorm placement. The Residence assistant looked skeptical as he led him to the House of Recollection.

A bleak resident under the shadow of castle walls revealed itself. The garden was filled with withered thickets, and the building looked faded as though it no longer saw any use.

“T-this is the House of Recollection! I-I have things to do so I’m going to leave. Find a room yourself!”

The Residence assistant left the scene as though he was running away in fear. The frightful exterior was one thing, but it was also the center of frightful rumors which made [one’s teeth shiver in the summer](#). Despite this, there was a reason that Sungchul had chosen to make the House of Recollection his dorm. That was because it was among the oldest of the buildings in Airfruit, and as such, it contained the memorials of ancient sages hidden within. Of course, it was difficult for the average student to deal with and

beings born out of the accumulated malice also existed here, but if he could overcome such difficulties, he would be able to experience the rapid growth that he so desired.

Korean idiom-Koreans say they like to watch horror genre in the summer because it gives them the ‘chills’ to chase the heat away.

“ ”

Without hesitation he stepped further into the House of Recollection.

Chapter 34 – Admission (3)

Once the door was opened, the damp smell of mold assaulted his nose.

Each step he took on the wood panel floor caused it to creak loudly as if someone was screaming.

Sungchul sensed a presence standing up on the floor above him.

The presence quickly ran down the stairs without a sound and hid itself in the darkness that stretched out from the dorms.

Judging from its actions, it probably planned on secretly observing Sungchul.

Sungchul pretended not to notice and walked straight ahead.

After brushing past a few spider webs, he came across a dining room that was illuminated by candlelight.

The dining room consisted of five wooden tables large enough to seat four people, but four of the tables were covered with a white cloth as if they were no longer in use. On the contrary, the last remaining table had a vase on it, together with a freshly preserved flower.

“Who dares to disturb my rest?” It was at this moment that the

presence Sungchul had noticed earlier spoke to him.

It was a feminine voice that had an eerie wail as though from a ghost.

It probably was a trick to scare Sungchul away by pretending to be a ghost, but such trivial tricks would never work on him.

Sungchul kept an expressionless face as he continued forward on his way to the stairs, eventually passing by the room where the mysterious woman hid.

“How impudent! Ignoring my warnings!”

Once again, the voice of the woman reverberated from behind.

At the same time, a strange wave passed through the entirety of the dormitory, causing objects to float and shake ominously. At the same time, a thick mist settled in the stairway to block vision, and the objects began to rattle even more violently.

The mysterious spectacle was so unsettling that an unsuspecting passerby would have been scared out of their wits and would long since have been sent running.

But Sungchul remained unfazed as he continued walking up the stairs.

By the time Sungchul had stepped on the last step of the stairway, the floating objects had settled back down, and the mist had vanished.

“You! Do you really want to die?”

The voice of a young girl rang out from behind him.

Sungchul paused to look back.

A blonde girl dressed in white was glaring up at him, full of anger. She had an appearance of 15 or 16 year old.

She had such a beautiful appearance that given a few years she would be able to charm a great number of men. But there was one crucial problem.

It was impossible for a girl of that age to exist in this world. The so-called ‘final generation’ who had narrowly escaped the Curse of Extinction were all in their early twenties.

In other words, all children under the age of twenty had been afflicted by the God’s curse and suffered from an agonizingly painful incurable disease, and for the most part, they had all already died. Even if they somehow survived, they were stuck in a state that was between the living and the dead.

Sungchul believed that the blonde girl before him was an apparition of a child from the latter case. He soon discovered the

reason.

‘This child... she is no longer alive.’

He could hear her irregular breath, but not her heartbeat. In other words, her lifespan had already ended; she was now a living corpse.

Soul Engraving – once the Eye of Truth was activated Sungchul spotted a much more severe problem that was plaguing the girl.

From the top of her head to the bottom of her feet, dozens of different types of preservation magic were enclosing the girl like a cocoon.

It was a spectacle that showed the magician’s obsession to preserve the girl’s original appearance despite all circumstances.

At that moment, Sungchul felt an ache from a corner of his chest and a frown formed on his face.

In the girl, he saw a mad struggle of a man who desperately fought to keep her alive, who would do anything and everything to save the one who was dear to him.

Their methods were different, but what they sought were the same.

“ ... ”

While Sungchul remained silent, the girl took a step closer.

The girl confirmed the frown on his face and made a mischievous grin.

“Finally, you act surprised.”

Sungchul looked at her wordlessly.

“Now, can you get out? This is my house. I’ll be troubled if an outsider like yourself comes in brashly.”

The girl waved her hands, gesturing him to leave.

The motion of her hands was enough to wake Sungchul from his heavy-hearted reminiscence.

‘Ah, I was spacing out.’

Sungchul quickly regained his calm while tasting a deep bitterness spreading in his mouth.

He opened his mouth while looking at the girl once again.

“Sorry but I am not an outsider.”

“Hmm? What do you mean?”

The girl crossed her arms while spreading her feet slightly, before donning an attitude daring him to explain himself.

Sungchul confidently explained the reason why he was here.

“I am a freshman that was admitted today, and the Aged Jorgbart designated my dorm as the ‘House of Recollection’. Do I need any other reason?”

“Really? That ancient Jorgbart?”

There was an effect. The girl appeared surprised.

Sungchul used this momentum adding in another statement.

“If he didn’t, why would I leave aside all those other normal dormitories and choose this eerie place?”

“Mmm... You’re not wrong... In any case, if Jorgbart had designated this dorm as your own, I have no right to refuse. I can double check with the Homunculus later, but that can be put off until later...”

The girl who had been dying to chase Sungchul out fell quiet while in deep thought.

Eventually, She let out a sigh and looked defeated.

“Mmm... I guess I can't do anything. I am also a student of Airfruit Academy after all. I will respect the Old man Jorgbart's decision. Since that's also part of our tradition.”

The unknown girl dropped her shoulder and turned around, but quickly turned around again looking vexed, speaking in a warning tone.

“My name is Sarasa, School of Cryomancy. I don't recommend underestimating me because of how young I look; I am 5 years your senior.”

Finishing her introduction, Sarasa swiftly turned around and ran up the stairs.

“Use any empty room on the 1st floor. It's a little messy but the cleaning supplies are in the storage closet next to the dining room, so make use of that. Be sure to put it back after you've used it. The 2nd floor is for female students only, so you are not allowed up to the 2nd floor without getting my permission from the bottom of the stairs first, so don't forget that. I am not very nice..”

Once she was done nagging like a mother-in-law, she went up the stairs in a few light movements and disappeared into the darkness.

In the silence that returned to the surroundings, Sungchul stared

at the direction Sarasa disappeared to for a while longer.

‘An undead who hasn’t yet accepted her own death...’

Sungchul began walking around on the first floor to pick his room.

Soon, he found an empty room at the end of the hallway that he claimed as his own.

It was a messy room that was filled with dust and cobwebs as Sarasa had warned, but Sungchul didn’t mind.

At the very least, it had walls and a roof that would shelter him from the wind and rain, and also a bed he could rest on.

“I’ll do some cleaning tomorrow.”

Next Day.

Sungchul was led by the Residence Assistant to head to the School building for Cosmomancy.

The building for Cosmomancy was located precariously on the edge of a steep cliff on the northern region, the highest area, within the border of the rocky mountain and castle walls that

surrounded Airfruit academy.

“There used to be a magically operated lift that would bring us up to the top, for some reason it isn’t operational anymore!”

Sungchul and the Residence Assistant had to carefully climb a precarious flight of stairs carved into the cliff wall.

There was even a broken segment in the stairway where visitors had to make a potentially life-threatening jump to reach the other side. The Residence Assistant barely made it across, and then shouted proudly

“Now! Student’s turn! Time to show your courage! Humans who have longer legs and therefore superior jumping power than myself should be able to make it! Being unable to do this would mean you are a pooppy human!”

Sungchul leaped over the gap lightly, making the Residence Assistant eat his own words..

The smile on Residence Assistant’s face faded as quickly as it came.

“Ah... I guess it is as expected of a Summoning palace graduate. On a completely different level than your average resident. Well, it’s not like they can get in anymore, though.”

After they climbed the steep set of stairs that felt like a rock wall,

they finally arrived at the Cosmomancy school building located at the peak of the mountain.

The building was a stone structure of medium size, and its defining feature was the large telescope attached to its round dome on the top.

“Now, it is time to enter, Student!”

Sungchul left behind the Residence Assistant and pushed his way through the heavy doors to enter the Cosmomancy school building.

The first thing that caught his gaze was the jade colored interior.

Another part was that the entire interior of the building consisted of a small number of pillars, with no walls or floors separating the rooms; and an open space with the dome at its center.

So any sound made in the building would be amplified, and anyone in the building could see each other at all times.

Within a building which resembled a cathedral more than an academic building, Sungchul saw two men.

One was an old man whose hair and beard was almost halfway to having turned white.

The wrinkles etched by the ages didn't give off the feeling of dignity; but rather the feeling of stubbornness. His tightly shut lips had a 'weightiness' that didn't look as though it would open so easily as before.

The other person was an androgynous young man who looked magnanimous in stark contrast to the old man.

He was laying in a hammock tied between two pillars and reading a thick book as if it was a magazine.

The first person to respond to Sungchul's appearance was the young man.

"Who is this? It seems that a guest has arrived." He stood up from the Hammock and approached Sungchul.

"How did you end up here?"

Sungchul looked towards the old man behind the youth and answered briefly.

"I have come to receive tutelage."

The youth smiled broadly.

"It's been awhile since we had a newcomer."

He put his hands forward and introduced himself to Sungchul.

“I am an inexperienced mage trying to learn the cosmomancy magic of the great Altugius, Leonard Sanctum.”

“...Sungchul Kim.”

Sungchul revealed his name as he grasped the youth’s hands.

“Oh gee, what a terrifying name. Are you a summoning palace graduate by any chance?”

Sungchul nodded.

“I see. A Summoning Palace Graduate. I thought it was strange that we would get a newcomer so suddenly, so that’s your story. Sorry for dragging things out. I believe the teacher is waiting, so let’s step inside.”

Leonard politely opened a path.

Sungchul didn’t have any opinion on Leonard.

He didn’t have anything to evaluate him with aside from his extraordinarily reputable family name.

At the very least, he wasn't uncouth as to repeatedly stare at any specific feature of Sungchul's face, nor did he mix any subtle self-praise into his words.

Sungchul approached the old man who sat on top of a stone pile arranged like a tree.

"I have come to receive tutelage."

Sungchul was in no way inferior to that old man, but he decided to lower his head this one time.

This was the proper attitude of someone looking to learn.

The old man stared at Sungchul with stubborn eyes, after which he pointed towards the air and summoned a single book.

He had taken a book out from his Soul Storage.

The old man handed the thick book over to Sungchul and spoke in a clear and piercing voice.

"I am a retired old man with nothing left to teach. Regrettably, you have chosen wrong from many possible choices, and the result was the misfortune of meeting me. All I can give you is this book.

The Old man offered the book again.

“I have become old and my arms lack strength. Quickly take it.”

Once Sungchul received the book, the old man turned his back towards Sungchul and lit a pipe.

“After a week, you will be given an opportunity to change your major. You shouldn’t fritter your time away, raising your basic stats by reading that book should help you in achieving the path you desire after this.”

Those were his final words.

It wasn’t a trial nor an attempt to size him up. He no longer tried to speak with Sungchul.

And it looked as though he would no longer listen to anything he had to say...

‘Altugius Xero was it? The old man has already isolated himself from the world.’

He had met with an unexpected resistance.

Sungchul had heard from Christian that the Cosmomancy professor Altugius Xero was a cranky and fastidious old man, but he never expected that the man had gone so far as to renounce his duty as a teacher.

“ ... ”

Sungchul, who was still holding the book, stood at a crossroads..

Leonard resumed his spot on the Hammock and watched Sungchul with a bemused smile.

Currently, the number of students that had come to seek Cosmomancy were a severe minority already, but when they met Althugius, who rejected even that small minority, they walked away without hesitation.

By this world's standards, the summoned would all make the same decision as all those who came before him.

How could he hope to learn anything under a teacher who refused to teach?

But something surprising occurred.

Unlike all the other newcomers before him, the black haired youth who wore a raggedy field jacket and worn out jeans sat down where he stood and began to read the book given to him by the professor.

It was thought that he would quickly grow bored and leave, but Sungchul showed no sign of moving anytime soon.

In this building where even the smallest of sounds were amplified, the sound of each page turning was clearly transmitted into everyone's ears.

Once Sungchul reached the 30th page, the Old man finally turned back to take a closer look at the mysterious student who was sitting before him.

Chapter 35 – Altugius (1)

The book's exterior looked plain, but as soon as it was opened, the mystique of magic that was hidden within became visible. The illustrations drawn in black ink sprang to life and began moving. The lines and shapes it held that were disorderly on the first page began to repeatedly rearrange themselves in a loop. The completed form displayed the shape of a magical formation. Information regarding it appeared on the bottom of the first page.

[‘Understanding magic’ is not the ability to vaguely recall the finished product, but the thorough and complete understanding of every component which forms the whole.]

Behind the illustration was a blank page with a question asking whether the illustration was properly understood. The blank page contained a similar magical power to the illustration that was filled and erased according to the gestures made by Sungchul's finger or by a strong mental image.

Sungchul was initially intimidated by the book's unusual approach to presenting the material and its questions, but he was curious about the content and began to earnestly solve the questions given. He focused on carefully observing the movements of the ever-changing shapes and in understanding the logic that was behind them. He was soon able to draw out everything he had understood onto the blank page through using his imagination which resulted in a visual shape.

[Impressive! You have succeeded in solving the first problem in Understanding Magical Formations (Elementary).]

Reward: Intuition +1

Intuition had risen by solving a simple problem. Before moving on to the next page, Sungchul flipped to the final page and confirmed that there were still 50 problems remaining; he returned to the front and resumed solving from where he had left off. By the time Sungchul reached the 13th problem, he saw through the many windows of the Hall that it was already dark outside.

Leonard Sanctum, who had been lying on the hammock leisurely, must have left the Hall in the meantime.

‘It seems like a lot of time has passed.’

He had managed to raise his intuition by 5 just solving some problems within the course of the day. Whenever the problem felt slightly difficult, he was assured to gain additional intuition. He wanted to solve problems for a while longer, but he had promised that he would go to meet with Christian tonight. He slipped a bookmark into the page that he was currently on and returned it to Altugius.

“I have prior engagements, so I’ll take my leave. I’ll return the book for now and come back tomorrow.”

“....”

Altugius looked at Sungchul with a disapproving face before receiving the book with an emaciated arm. Sungchul nodded and headed towards the exit, the old mage opened the book and took a peek at where the bookmark had been left. Suspicion rose in Altugius's eyes.

“You, over there.”

He called out to Sungchul who was reaching for the door. When Sungchul turned around, he spoke with his steely voice laced thick with disdain.

“Did you truly solve it up to this part?”

He opened the book to the page marked by Sungchul and pointed at it with his finger. Sungchul lightly nodded his head.

“Is there a problem?”

“No. No problem at all.”

Altugius closed the book and returned to his seat. When the old man turned silent once more, Sungchul opened the door and headed outside towards the setting sun. When the door finally closed, the old man, who had shown nothing but disdain from the start, stared at the book in utter bewilderment and disbelief as he looked at the page marked by Sungchul.

‘A freshman who could solve up to the 13th problem within a quarter of a day? Unbelievable! Isn’t this a talent that has not been seen in the past hundred years?’

Rather than talent, it would have been more accurate to attribute it to his experience. Sungchul had been fighting fallen mages with his life on the line even before he had managed to obtain his overwhelming strength. The tense moments of life and death that repeated continuously led Sungchul to acquire the instincts to cope with magic as he experienced it first-hand with his body. After a certain point, he had grasped how to predict what kind of magic his opponent would be using by the brief flicker that appeared as the magician chanted; In other words, by looking at the shape of the magical formation. He struggled at first and almost lost his life a few times by predicting it incorrectly, but his experiences gradually helped in perfecting this skill.

Even during the battle with the Grand Mage Balzark, the head of the infamous Followers of Calamity and the devourer of souls, Sungchul overcame his opponent of higher renown than his own by predicting the mage’s magic and acting first. For someone who was able to accurately predict spells based on magic formations that didn’t last for over a tenth of a second, Altugius’s book was nothing more than a low difficulty rite of passage.

“Mmm....”

Altugius logged into the magic network which was available across the entire Academy. He was looking for information on this unknown student who had left quite an impression on him.

He was alarmed at the name, and then once again when he read the name of the dorm the student was assigned to

“What...? He was assigned to the House of Recollections? How can that be... that can’t be...?!”

Between these two shocking events, it was the latter that caused him to tremor so intensely. The old man’s eyes fluttered vigorously. He immediately pulled a staff from the air and tapped it on the ground. The magical lift that had been inoperable until now spewed mystical lights as it reactivated. The old mage then rode the lift down the cliff and headed towards the House of Recollections.

“Sarasa. Sarasa!”

The old mage called out a girl’s name with a hurried voice as soon as the tightly shut doors of the eerie dorm flew open. The blond girl revealed herself beyond the hallway like an apparition. The old man approached the girl and held her hand tightly in both of his and asked her cautiously.

“Sarasa. Did anything strange... happen?”

The blond girl looked at the hurried old man as though he was crazy before pulling her hands away and spoke with a shocked expression.

“Eh? What is this crazy talk? There’s no reason anything strange would happen.”

The girl who had been looking at the old man with an exasperated expression suddenly recalled something and said

“Ah, some weird guy came here. He said something about the Aged Jorgbart assigning him to this dorm. I tried to scare him away, but maybe it’s because he’s a summoned, it didn’t work.”

“I see. Sarasa, I was worried. I thought something might have happened to my sweet Sarasa because of that guy...”

Altugius looked at the girl with a worried gaze once more and expressed concern. Sarasa only looked annoyed and shot back with a sharp tongue.

“What do you mean something could happen? I’m the strongest student on leave. It might not seem like it, but I’m still a lich, you know?”

“I... know.”

Regret flashed across the old man’s eyes. He worried that his excessive concern had reopened a past wound for the girl.

Sarasa looked directly at the conflicted old man before placing both of her hands onto his that held his staff.

“Don’t worry, grandpa. Shouldn’t we be more worried about you than about me?”

The little girl’s hands were as cold as the breath which came from her lips.

“It still isn’t too late. It might be wiser to transfer from Airfruit to Logotete.”

When they met, Christian’s appearance had improved once more. Especially his crude wooden claws, which had been in place of his hands, had been replaced with prosthetics that somewhat resembled a human limb. Sungchul watched Christian manipulate his new prosthetics to hold his drink with a passing gaze before speaking.

“Is the state of Airfruit that bad?”

“Yes. There was a full-time headmaster before, but after Magnus’ questionable death, the headmaster’s position has been empty for 3 years now. There have been several motions to appoint a new headmaster from the faculty, but the fierce conflict from the main schools, the school of pyromancy and the school of cryomancy, has continuously delayed it which caused the school to fall into its current desolate state. To make matters worse, the Followers of Calamity have also appeared... It could be said that Airfruit’s fate is sealed.”

Christian hung his head and deeply apologized to Sungchul for his poor decision. However, Sungchul didn't show much of a reaction. He was only interested in one thing.

“Is there more to gain from Airfruit or is there more to gain from Logotete?”

Christian answered readily as though he had been waiting for this question.

“Logotete is a rising name. It can't be compared to Airfruit that has stood for thousands of years, but it has proven to be very stable without much internal conflict in comparison. It also has the greatest professors of the Necromancy school of magic.”

“Necromancy School...”

This school of magic was useless to Sungchul. What he needed was a single powerful blow rather than an army of corpses.

“It is difficult for me, who had recommended it, to say this, but Airfruit has lost its ability as an educational institute. If I had known of this ahead of time...”

If Christian went as far as to say this much, it had to be the truth. At the very least, he wasn't someone who would bluff or exaggerate the truth. With just this much, Sungchul would have given considerable credence to transferring from Airfruit to

Logotete, but there was something he wanted to confirm before making up his mind.

“Do you know of the old man named Altugius Xero?”

“Yes. I have heard of him. He never managed to leave much of a name behind, but there is a rumor that he is the greatest Cosmomancer that Airfruit Academy has ever made.”

“Hooh?”

Curiosity flashed in Sungchul’s eyes. The old man looked like someone that has been forgotten in the flow of time, but to have such a history... Sungchul recalled the old man’s back when he was sitting alone in the empty hall before he asked his next question.

“Then why couldn’t he leave his mark on anything?”

If one had the skill, his name would naturally be left behind in history. Whether that was through fame or infamy.

“I’m not sure. That’s something I can’t confirm, but according to rumor, I heard he caused a huge incident during his formative years.”

“An incident?”

“Yes. It even led to him killing the vice-captain of an assassin

guild in a duel.”

“That’s hard for me to believe.”

Suspicion rose in Sungchul’s mind. The Assassin Class was known to be the bane of the Mage Class. In a duel between two equally skilled opponents, it was certain for the mage to be killed by the assassin. Assassins had many techniques that could be used for negating a mage’s attack and could force a critical blow to a mage in just an instant. And if this assassin was the Vice-Captain, the second best of the assassin’s guild? In a one to one combat? This was a scenario any average mage would have no hope of winning.

“Is that the truth?”

“Could be. I can’t say that I know the truth behind it. I’ve only heard of it as a rumor that was floating around, after all.”

“But if it is the truth, the assassin’s guild wouldn’t have left Altugius alone, would they?”

If Christian’s story was true, there was no way that Professor Altugius could still be breathing. The assassins lived by the iron-clad rule that ten brothers had to take revenge for the death of a brother. If someone with the rank of Vice Captain were to die, then the head of the guild himself would call for a kill command. He recalled a certain dark-skinned man’s face in his hazy memories.

‘Shamal Rajput. If that guy handled it personally, not only Altugius, but the entire Airfruit Academy would be eliminated overnight.’

Sungchul looked at Christian with a bored expression while having these thoughts. Christian, who felt that he was being interrogated, spoke nervously.

“I can’t guarantee this, but as far I as know, the assassin’s guild that lost their vice captain and Airfruit Academy entered into some kind of an agreement, and Professor Altugius disappeared from the public eye.

Sungchul stroked his chin and nodded. That made more sense. The number 2 of the guild of assassins, known to have gathered the greatest of assassins, had lost a duel against an unknown mage would have been enough to plummet the guild’s reputation into the dirt. It would have been a more profitable trade for the guild to simply hide the truth by locking up Altugius within the school.

“What will you do then? If you wish to go to Logotete, I’ll get you set on the procedure. After all, there are still some gold and jewels remaining.”

Sungchul stood at the crossroads once again. Airfruit Academy had lost its function as a school, and the rumors regarding Altugius wasn’t assuring. Thus, if he remained within Airfruit, it would mean he would be taking on a very heavy risk.

He couldn’t say for sure, but this moment felt extremely similar

to when he had first stepped onto Eckheart's trials. Whether it would be a boon or not was something that could only be determined after he took off the lid. But Sungchul was an unreasonable glutton when it came to growth. He would take the path with the greatest danger if it also had the greatest rewards.

“I'll remain in Airfruit. If I can learn magic from the man who defeated a vice captain of the Assassin's guild, there would be nothing better than that.”

The next day, a new face made its way to the Cosmomancy building. Rather than a student, the man's clothes resembled that of a homeless person. The man climbed up the cliff to report to the observatory every morning. He borrowed the book from an old and stubborn professor and read the book until late into the night. After a week had passed, he had completed the book he got from the old man and spoke when he returned it this time.

“Are there no other books?”

“....”

The old man didn't speak as he pulled out another book from his soul storage.

One book, two books, three books... The books he pulled out from the storage continued to increase in number. When he had pulled out the 18th book, he curtly spoke to this mysterious man he had yet to accept as his disciple.

“I’ll lend you these books, but I’m only going to lend you books, nothing else.”

Sungchul steadily looked at the books that were piled up to his height, grabbed one, and went to a corner to pour over it.

‘What an odd fellow.’

It wasn’t an act or a trick. Sungchul was genuinely holding the magic tome and reading its contents as he turned the power written within the tome into his own. That genuine passion was enough to awaken some forgotten emotion that laid buried deep within Altugius. The way he looked towards Sungchul began to change, but he couldn’t find it in himself to express any such emotions; Which was all because of the wolfish bastard lying lazily on the hammock who was watching him carefully. When their eyes met, Leonard Sanctum made a strange smile while muttering aloud.

“Ah! When will I get to learn some Cosmomancy. Doesn’t anyone feel bad for the disciple that only has his dear old teacher in his heart.”

This former disciple of his, was currently a Follower of Calamity.

Chapter 36 – Altugius (2)

“You, over there.”

It was unprecedented for Altugius to be the first to speak to Sungchul.

“ ... ”

But Sungchul didn't respond to this. He was instead devoting all of his attention to reading his books.

“You there. Summoned.”

On the second beckoning, Sungchul raised his head and looked at the old mage. Leonard Sanctum, who had been lying on his hammock, heard the voice and began to raise his body to look over as well. Altugius started to speak.

“It looks to me that you've been spending all your time here since you've been admitted. Do you have a guidance counselor?”

“No, I do not.”

Sungchul didn't recall ever hearing of such things. A soft muttering spilled out of Altugius' lips.

‘Even if the school is in its current state, to not share such basic

information...’

Leonard seemed to share this opinion.

“Oh, my! A week has passed, and you still haven’t chosen a guidance counselor?”

The lighthearted voice echoed in the empty hall. After a brief moment, Sungchul asked his question.

“What is a guidance counselor?”

Altugius’ silver brows trembled lightly upon hearing his words. To not know such basic information that all freshmen ought to know. It was a damning proof that showed that the school had begun to crumble at its very foundations. This would have been unthinkable back when Altugius or even Leonard were freshmen at Airfruit.

The observatory rang out in Leonard’s laughter.

“Oh my goodness. A freshman that doesn’t even know what a guidance counselor is. These truly are some dark times.”

He fell back onto the hammock and closed his eyes, a smirk on his face. As the silence returned, Altugius looked directly at Sungchul and spoke quietly.

“I apologize, but as I have said before, I have no intention of teaching anyone, and therefore I cannot be anyone’s guidance counselor. Seek someone else.”

“I understand.”

Sungchul spoke indifferently and returned to reading his book with intense focus as usual. Unrelentingly. There wasn’t a more joyous sight for an educator than to see such a studious attitude from a brilliant student, but it only made Altugius burn with more anxiety.

‘This fellow... Maybe he isn’t aware of the consequences of not selecting a guidance counselor?’

All freshmen must choose a guidance counselor within ten days, and those who haven’t found an educator within ten days would lose the right of being a student. This was initially a rule set in place to allow professors to work together to cast out undeserving students who entered the school using underhanded methods, but the circumstances have changed. If the school was operating normally, the freshmen orientation would have been organized, and through the orientation, the students would have been informed of all of the school’s expectations of them.

However, in the current state with the stunted flow of students they had, the welcoming ceremonies had all long since been done away with, and there was no one left for them to teach. If he had chosen the popular school of Pyromancy or Cryomancy, the assistants would have given him the proper procedures, but there was no such service within the school of Cosmomancy.

Sungchul continued to wrestle with the books for another day in the observatory, clueless about what was about to happen to him. Altugius' concerns only grew deeper.

‘That fellow. At this rate, he’ll be expelled three days from now.’

The problem was Leonard Sanctum, who had promptly left the observatory during the evenings, was almost spitefully holding his ground. He would only get up from his hammock and leave the observatory after Sungchul left. His intentions were clear. He wanted to rid himself of the annoying presence that has appeared at the observatory. And he could do so without having to get his hands dirty.

A similar situation occurred the next day. The shabby man, who didn't even have a uniform, immersed himself in the pile of books which towered as high as he was. He didn't speak and instead devoted himself to the books, except when he went to leave for lunch.

Altugius waited for this opportunity to warn Sungchul regarding the impending danger, but Leonard rose from his hammock each time so as to remind Altugius of his presence. He smiled brightly on the outside, but Altugius knew of his hidden heinous personality within. If Altugius expressed any concern for Sungchul, Leonard would use that as an excuse to try and protest for the secret tome of Cosmomancy that was held by Altugius. That would be absolutely unacceptable.

If the true tome of Airfruit which has been guarded for generations, were to fall into the hands of the Followers of Calamity, the destruction of the world would only accelerate.

‘It is enough with just my hands being dirty.’

Altugius remained silent in the end and didn’t rise.

Two more days passed. There was only a single day left. Sungchul remained fixated in his studies. Altugius wasn’t observing Sungchul because of his brilliant mind, but for his incredible tenacity. A question rose in his mind. Why would a summoned from another world be so attached to a niche school of magic? And so he ended up asking directly.

“That book, do you understand what you’re reading?”

The question had a hidden motive behind it, one of determination. Leonard, who understood the intentions, smiled widely again.

“Teacher is getting quite mischievous.”

He knew about the book that Sungchul was reading, and the books within the pile that were towering over Sungchul as well. The ball was now in Sungchul’s court.

Sungchul, who was faced down reading his book, raised his head, not too quickly nor too slowly and looked at Altugius. There was a

brief moment of silence at which Sungchul shook his head.

“I have been digging into it for a week now, but honestly, I don’t understand it one bit.”

A breath of sigh escaped from Altugius’ lips. It wasn’t to rebuke Sungchul’s ignorance, but rather rebuking his inability. The books that he had given to Sungchul were not meant to be understood from the very beginning. They required foreknowledge and a certain amount of intuition before its contents could be understood. As long as the prerequisites have not been met, the reader could do nothing but become lost in the maze of words. The answer Sungchul had given was the expected answer.

‘This fellow...’

The time that seemed to be crawling along now sped up as Altugius opened his mouth once again.

“Why have you not asked me a question if you didn’t understand?”

At this question, Sungchul closed the book and spoke in a matter of fact manner.

“Isn’t that because you are not yet my teacher?”

A feeling of shame and anger churned within Altugius as he met eyes with Sungchul’s firm gaze. He didn’t express it, but his guts

were violently twisting, and his legs felt quite weak. Altugius wordlessly returned to his own seat. He could feel Leonard's gaze searing into his back, but he ignored it and thought of Sungchul. He thought of a convenient, yet an undesirable truth that he had been forgetting.

‘That’s right. He was in the House of Recollections!’

That evening, Altugius Xero sought out his granddaughter who was residing within the House of Recollections and began a conversation with a voice full of affection amidst countless eavesdropping ears.

“How is the new student? Does he look to be doing well? He has been very busy since the last time I saw him, and he doesn’t even have his own uniform either. No matter if he’s a summoned, what kind of Airfruit student doesn’t keep such basic decorum!”

Sarasa’s face, who had been listening to her grandfather’s story, grew sour.

That night, Sungchul encountered an unexpected guest in his room. Sarasa had pulled up a chair and had been waiting for him in his room.

“It is time for some special ‘ethical education’, freshman.”

The lich girl’s eyes had an azure glow...

Sungchu felt that the girl's sudden visit was quite odd, but he remained silent and waited for her to continue. Sarasa held something out towards Sungchul.

“You. Have you gotten this? You haven't, have you?”

It was an official student notebook, made from lambskin. There was the name of its owner written on the first page of this well-used notebook clearly looking worn with all of its frayed edges.

[Sarasa Xero]

‘Ho?’

Curiosity sparked in Sungchul's eyes, but he didn't express any of it and simply nodded in response.

“I haven't received such a thing.”

Sarasa sighed and spoke again.

“I'll lend you this one, but read over the ‘Freshman's Attitude’ that's written on the second page carefully.”

He couldn't quite understand the reasoning behind her actions,

but there didn't seem to be any hostility. Also after reading so many phrases of undecipherable text, he felt drawn to read something legible for once. Sungchul obediently did as Sarasa had asked.

<Freshman's Attitude>

[1. As an Airfruit student, I will maintain its dignity.]

[2. I will not become involved in unnecessary conflict.]

[3. I will not overeat.]

[4. I will return the library's books before their due date.]

[5. I will always keep a respectful attitude towards my teachers. I will not look down on them regardless of their majors.]

...

Sungchul took his eyes away after this point and looked towards Sarasa.

"I don't feel there is a need to read this so carefully."

"What if there's something more important written at the bottom?"

Sarasa crossed her arms and spoke in a smug voice. He moved his gaze towards the notebook once again. There was another passage

below the ‘Freshman’s Attitude’, written as finely as grains of sand.

<Important! Things freshmen need to do>

Receive a uniform from Bington’s Clothier

Receive a dorm designation from Aged Jorgbart

Complete the basic course in etiquette from Professor Robert Danton

Attend Senior Student’s Orientation

Select a Major within Registrar’s Office

Select a professor from a major / perform introductions

Attend Freshman Welcoming Ceremony

Select responsible Guidance Counselor

...

Sungchul’s gaze stopped at the entry regarding the guidance counselor. There were five stars next to the entry with the words ‘Expulsion!’ written beside it.

“Do you now know what you’ve done wrong?”

Sarasa’s eyes flared as she suddenly rose from her seat.

“Are you referring to choosing a guidance counselor?”

When Sungchul asked, Sarasa forcefully shook her head and pointed at the first entry in the notebook.

“No. For not wearing a uniform!”

“ ... ”

“Even if the school is falling apart, how can a student of the renowned Airfruit Academy be dressed like that? Clothes are the minimal civility towards others which reveals one’s own nature. No wonder gramps was nagging at me.”

“Who is your grandfather?”

“Who do you think? It’s Professor Altugius Xero. Haven’t you heard of the legendary figure that took care of the mad dog of a vice-captain from the Assassin’s Guild that was causing a ruckus on our campus?”

“Ah, is that right?”

Sarasa began nodding to Sungchul’s reply and continued to nag. She continued to prattle on, but her words could actually be condensed into a single sentence: “Wear a uniform”. However, Sungchul was more interested in another part.

“What should I do if no professor of my major will agree to become my guidance counselor?”

“That’s how it ends up if you don’t wear a uniform. Well, you should then request a minor professor. Of course, only after you have received the uniform from Bington’s Clothier!”

The next day, Sungchul visited the Office of Admissions. The Resident Assistant was waiting within.

“Where is Bington’s Clothier?”

Sungchul didn’t plan on completely ignoring Sarasa’s advice. There weren’t many people on campus, but the laborer’s fashion that he was currently wearing was undeniably conspicuous. However, the Residence Assistant gave him an unexpected reply.

“Student! Are you referring to Bington? Why are you looking for some human that’s been fired ages ago?”

“Then what about uniforms? I don’t have to wear one?”

“Uniforms have to be bought with personal funds from an external clothier based on your personal preference!”

He had already failed the first objective that a freshman must achieve. Sungchul moved on to the next objective recorded in Sarasa’s notebook. He discovered that many things Sarasa had experienced had either been removed or was missing.

“What orientation is this when there are no students? Other than Palace graduates who barely got in, the rest are all inferior stock or from the Calamity generation!”

Helplessly, Sungchul moved on to the next destination that he had set for himself. School of Alchemy, House of Malleability.

Contrary to the School of Cosmomancy, the name was apt, but the building itself wasn't a structure, but rather a collapsing tent.

“...”

He opened the tent and entered. Several students who couldn't be seen anywhere else had gathered here. Many of them looked to be in their early 20s. They were from the Calamity generation.

“What brings you here?”

A student approached the unfamiliar guest and asked cautiously. Sungchul didn't hesitate to state his purpose.

“I came looking for a guidance counselor.”

A man with sunken eyes came out from deeper within the tent while scratching his head.

“A freshman? Hm? It's a summoned.”

He looked directly at Sungchul, then smiled, revealing his yellowed teeth.

“You. You wouldn’t have received Eckheart’s quest within the Summoning Palace and become an alchemist, have you?”

When Sungchul nodded, he slapped his knees with laughter while holding his belly for quite some time.

“Oh... my stomach. There hasn’t been anything to really laugh about recently, but I’ve finally found something worth laughing on. Anyways, you’re looking for a guidance counselor? Ok then. I am Basil Philrus. I will gladly be your guidance counselor.”

He asked for Sungchul’s personal details before opening his schoolwide Magic Network and perused Sungchul’s records.

“Oh my, you’re carrying such a terrifying name. Anyways, you’ve cut it very close. One more day and you would have had to pack up your things and leave!”

Hearing all of the information, Sungchul recalled Altugius within the Cosmomancy Observatory and then the face of Leonard.

‘The professor is one thing, but I wonder why that guy didn’t tell me any of this.’

That question was resolved, more or less, on the next day.

“Hey. Mr. Freshman. You can’t come in here.”

Leonard blocked the entrance with a bright smile. When Sungchul asked for the reason, Leonard put on a sorrowful face as to sympathize with Sungchul’s misfortunes while speaking.

“It is because you have been expelled. You’ll get the news soon... but to explain, you have yet to find a teacher to accept you within ten days of your admittance, in other words, you haven’t found a guidance counselor.”

“If it is only the guidance counselor, then I’ve already found one.”

Sungchul spoke firmly. It was for a brief moment, but Leonard’s lips twisted in a strange fashion.

“You’ve... found one?”

Leonard looked back.

“Not him.”

Sungchul said.

“The Alchemy Professor, Basil Philrus.”

“Ah... is that right?”

The displeasure on Leonard’s handsome face was clearly visible, but Sungchul didn’t pay it any mind. He passed by Leonard, who was holding his head down and sat at his usual spot to begin reading through the pile of books. Altugius let out a stifled sigh of relief as he closed his eyes while listening to the amplified sound of the turning pages in the observatory.

Chapter 37 – Alchemist (1)

“I believe it might be because Sir Warrior lacks the requirements to view the contents of the book.”

Christian solved the conundrum that had been plaguing Sungchul in one breath.

“Some magical tomes require being acquainted with a separate tome. Having extremely high intuition makes it possible to circumvent some of the peculiar requirements, but in most cases, the problem sir warrior is facing will occur.”

Sungchul nodded while watching the Sky Squirrel eat some nuts at the corner of the table.

“So that was the case.”

Other than the explosive growth at the beginning, he didn't manage to advance his intuition at all. It was a heartbreaking waste of time for Sungchul, who liked to optimize every second for his growth.

‘I should have met with this fellow a bit earlier to consult with him.’

However, Sungchul was the type of person who tried his hand at overcoming obstacles on his own before asking for help, but now that he knew that Altugius had given him indecipherable texts, an

alternative method would be required. Christian declared that he would find out the solution for him.

“...I’ll use my network of people and investigate regarding the book. Once we know the prerequisites such as which books you need to read before and the level of intuition required, it should become possible to decipher that book.”

The problem now was time. It wasn’t Sungchul’s intention to waste his time while he was waiting. He looked directly at Christian and asked him a question.

“What do you suppose I should do in the meantime?”

“Since you have chosen Alchemy as your minor, how about you use this time to receive some teachings regarding it while I try to decipher this book?”

“Alchemy?”

Sungchul’s mind recalled the image of the humble tent with the lifeless students that were all chattering away.

“That’s right. Although they can be regarded the delinquents of the school, they won’t chase away any student. In that way, you can also receive magic power and intuition. As magic power and intuition are the lifeblood of magicians, it could only be of benefit for you to raise it.”

“That’s a good idea.”

He also recalled the talking book that he had forgotten inside his soul storage. Despite everything, the book would be helpful in regards to alchemy.

Sungchul briefly opened the status window to check his stats.

[Stats]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Vitality 801 Magic Power 32

Intuition 35 Magic Resist 621

Resilience 502 Charisma 18

Luck 8

‘I have to drag my magic power and intuition over 100 as soon as I’m able.’

The basic spell for Cosmomancy required 130 magic power and 100 intuition. Currently, he couldn’t learn the spell even if Altugius had wanted to teach it to him. This meant that he would need to change his plans if he wanted to meet his goals. He organized all the things that needed to be done in his mind.

‘I’ll go to the Alchemy building first to raise my intuition, and I’ll then perform the quests inside the House of Recollection. Finally,

when my magic power and intuition exceeds 100, I'll come and find the Cosmomancy building again.'

It had been a winding journey, but now that he had set out on a direction, he could see the end in sight. He pulled out a jewel to reward Christian.

"It is always a pleasure."

Christian bent down to receive the jewel with a wide grin on his face.

Having accomplished everything he wanted to, he turned to leave when a certain someone's face appeared in his mind.

"Do you know of Leonard Sanctum?"

He hadn't thought about it much before as he wasn't very inconvenienced by Leonard, nor had he ever run into the man. However, Leonard revealed his true nature today. He had an unexpected amount of interest in Sungchul and wanted him expelled. It wasn't clear whether Leonard was an enemy with a purpose or simply a delinquent who enjoyed the suffering of others, but what was certain was that Sungchul didn't like either possibility. There was nothing wrong with having information ahead of time.

"Leonard... Leonard Sanctum... I've heard that name somewhere..."

Christian spent quite a while struggling to recall when his head shot up along with his finger.

“Did that person have brown or blonde hair? His nose slightly crooked like a hawk’s beak?”

“Perhaps.”

Christian pulled out a pen and paper, grabbed it with his prosthetic, then quickly sketched out a person’s face. The drawing overall was nothing more than a chicken scratch, but the identifying features were well emphasized. Sungchul looked at the portrait briefly and nodded.

“This is accurate. It is this man. When did you have such a talent for art?”

“It is because my minor was in dimensional magic. Surprisingly, they taught us music and art there as well. Anyways... I don’t know him directly, but he’s quite a famous figure. Why are you looking for him?”

“He was in the Cosmomancy building.”

Hearing this information, Christian tilted his head.

“Is he still in school? That’s strange. I only know him because his

face was on a poster back when I was attending.”

“For what reason?”

“He got expelled. He was found guilty of intentionally causing the death of 5 students during an in-school competition known as the ‘Gauntlet’. Whoever gets expelled can never return to school for any reason.”

“Well, he was inside the Cosmomancy building.”

Sungchul took some time to digest the information from Christian.

“It looks as though someone is backing him.”

“Could you look into it for me?”

Sungchul placed another jewel on the table as he rose from his seat.

“Excuse me, Sir Warrior. I have had a question I wanted to ask for a while now.”

Christian carefully inquired from behind while scratching his head.

“Ask.”

“Isn’t it a waste? Even if you give me this much money... Well, it’s not something someone on the receiving end should be saying, but... I feel that the compensation is excessive.”

“That is not something you have to concern yourself with.”

Christian would never have dreamt that the man who eight years ago had emptied the pride of the Merchant Coalition, ‘The Infinity Safe’, was standing right before him.

Sungchul moved to his next destination, leaving behind the two bright jewels.

“Yes~ I am the former tailor of the Airfruit Academy, Bington.”

Originally, Sungchul didn’t intend to wear the uniform, but he gained a bit of interest after Sarasa’s fervent emphasis. He pulled out a single gold coin and spoke to the tailor.

“I’d like to get fitted for one uniform.”

“Oh my, you’re a freshman. That’s fine. Please wait for a bit.”

The skinny tailor wore a monocle and was intensely staring at

him through it.

Sungchul's Soul Contract – Truth's Eye detected that the man was looking at him through magical means.

“Ok. Your measurements are complete. Do you prefer clothing to be a bit loose or snug?”

“I'd like an appropriate fit.”

“Ah, the most difficult of requests. Well, I'll have to show off a bit of my skills then.”

Bington began making the uniform using scissors and needles that moved independently one after the other with unbelievable proficiency deserving of his former title of as a tailor of Airfruit Academy. Sungchul watched with an interest which he hadn't felt in a long time, the rare performance of Bington's work.

‘Regardless of anything else, this man had reached the peak in his field. He truly deserves to be called a master.’

It didn't take 30 minutes for him to complete a full uniform.

“This is the famous Airfruit Academy Uniform, made from the best material by the masterful hands of the very best tailor. Would you like to try it on?”

It was called a uniform, but it had the form of a robe. Sungchul removed his outerwear and put on the school robe, before looking at himself in the mirror.

“Oh, my. Sir customer! You look quite striking. An extraordinary aura seems to flow out of you that it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that you could become a grand mage by tomorrow!”

Bington rubbed his hands together as he obviously buttered him up, but Sungchul’s response was quite passive.

‘What’s this...’

It was too tight to be called a robe. It was something like a skinny shirt which hugged his body’s muscle lines as though his body had been perfectly measured. It reminded him of something the thugs would wear back on Earth. His sleeves had been lopped off and were patternless as well. The worn, yellowing shirt he wore underneath being visible below the sleeveless and shapeless robe was nothing short of a crime against fashion. Bington was weakly smiling while rubbing his hands together and lingering at Sungchul’s side, as though that part was also bothering him.

“Your shirt from the other world is quite worn out! We also sell sleeveless shirts in our store that’s just as good as the other world’s clothes.”

However, his words didn’t reach Sungchul’s ears. He spoke plainly while looking in the mirror.

“Isn’t this too small? Why are there no sleeves?”

“It is the latest trend!”

Bington chatted away proudly.

“The latest trend?”

“The days when magicians stayed cooped up in the laboratory studying books is long past. Aren’t you the Magic Swordsman that lacks for nothing? Sir customer seems to have a marvelous male physique as I see it which is why I made it so that it accentuates Sir customer’s appeal to the maximum.”

“....”

Sungchul pulled off the robe and wore his military fatigues once again. The familiar looseness made his body feel relaxed.

‘This feels much better.’

A pine caterpillar has to eat pine needles.

Sungchul thought of this idiom as he left the shop, leaving the trending uniform behind.

The next day, Sungchul headed towards the Alchemy tent rather than the Cosmomancy Observatory. He was different from the usual, as his front pocket was quite full.

“How could you! Sticking a lady in such a place for days and not even checking once! Isn’t that just too much?”

Bertelgia was thoroughly peeved. She had been stuck inside the Soul Storage since Sajators’ Memorial. Sungchul had completely forgotten about her existence until now when he had pulled her out.

“Really! It’s the worst. The WORST! Starting from passing the trial with such an inappropriate method, how can you not have a single thing that is good about you? Are all summoned like this?”

Bertelgia continued to nag and hopped about in his pocket, but Sungchul didn’t show the slightest response. He spoke the moment they began to approach the Alchemy tent.

“I’ll stick you back into the Soul Storage if you don’t quiet down now.”

“.....”

Bertelgia was silenced with a single sentence; even her squirming within his pocket diminished. After calming Bertelgia, Sungchul entered through a straw mat door flap into a tent that was called ‘The House of Malleability’. This place reeked of marijuana.

Sungchul observed that several students were sitting on some placemats within the tent while smoking some marijuana. They were peeking over at him while whispering amongst themselves and snickering.

Sungchul ignored them and sought out the Alchemy Professor, Basil Philrus.

“Ahem. Who’s this? Isn’t it the freshman?”

A man with a burly physique suddenly blocked his path. His clothes appeared to be that of a student’s, but his eyes looked befuddled as he occasionally snickered from being inebriated by the marijuana.

‘For them to be so happily smoking marijuana this early in the morning.’

That wasn’t all. The rest of the students were also rolling around the ground with empty alcohol bottles. The people and the bottles littered the ground alike as if they were the same things.

Sungchul glared at the student blocking his path and spoke quietly.

“Where is Professor Basil Philrus?”

“Basil Hyung? Basil hyung is inside sleeping with a barmaid.”

The burly student snickered again and pointed into the tent.

Sungchul discovered two bodies, one male and one female sleeping together, wrapped around one another inside a closed off section separated by a portiere.

‘It’s a complete circus. Even beyond what I’d expected.’

He regretted coming so early in the morning.

Chapter 38 – School Of Alchemy (2)

However, he couldn't just waste time after getting this far. Grasping at straws, Sungchul asked the man in front of him

“I wish to learn alchemy. Where do I start?”

“There are textbooks scattered on the floor, with the ingredients and the cauldrons all outside the hut.”

The man clucked in laughter before returning to where his friends were waiting for him; while speaking loudly for everyone to hear.

“That guy is so earnest! You know what he said to me? He said he wanted to learn alchemy!”

He exploded with laughter as though it was the greatest joke he had ever heard.

“Why would someone like that come HERE!”

The rest of the students snickered along as they continued to puff on marijuana cigarettes with smoke pouring out of their nose and mouth. In some sense, it had a similar atmosphere to that of the school of cosmomancy.

Sungchul didn't bother with their taunts and began to look

through the floor that was littered with beer bottles and trash in search of the lost textbooks.

“There. That book.”

Bertelgia whispered from his pocket. Sungchul discovered a thin book that was ‘stored’ under a pile of bottles and grabbed it with his hand.

<Beginner’s Alchemy that even Ogres can follow>

The students who were watching Sungchul with interest burst into laughter at the sight.

“Look at that. Mr. Serious Summoned managed to find a book!”

“Worthy of being Eckheart’s successor!”

With such an eye-catching title, the book appeared to be intended for children. Upon opening the book, it revealed the illustrations of a goofy-looking ogre stirring a cauldron. They were laughing because they knew about this.

As usual, Sungchul was not fazed by the mockery of such insignificant people. He left the torrent of mockery behind him as he exited the tent.

He could see several cauldrons and a storage made of out of wooden planks stuck together. The cauldrons were filled with dust and spider webs, and the storage cabinet was left neglected.

“Whew. Who were those bastards? Really? They dare call themselves alchemists! What a disgrace!”

Bertelgia squirmed once again.

“Alchemists are treated like dogs even now! They are all pathetic people who can’t see how great alchemy really is.”

Sungchul listened to her complaints and took a seat on a tree stump near an alchemic cauldron before opening the book. A distinct feeling came into mind as he turned the first page. Easy. It looked stupidly easy. He read through the entire ‘Beginner’s Alchemy that even Ogres can follow’ in one breath. There was quite a bit of content, but that wasn’t a problem for Sungchul. It was a moment when having being lost in the maze of indecipherable text for the past week had finally paid off.

“A warrior like you should know that combat raises associated status points; alchemy and magic also increase related status points the more you use them.”

Bertelgia piped up when Sungchul closed the book as though she had been waiting to speak. He pulled her out of his pocket and nodded.

She tottered along Sungchul's palm like a human and spoke like an educator.

“Another thing. There seems to be some connection between that cauldron next to you and the book. In other words, successfully ‘synthesizing alchemical solutions within the boundaries of the academy using the cauldron and textbooks provided’ is considered as completion of a quest, and a suitable reward is given. This is a common teaching mechanism in Magic Academies.”

“Is that so?”

“Yep. Academies are, in essence, culminations of massive quests created by their predecessors. Even the oft-ridiculed Alchemy operates under the same principle.

While listening to her insight, Sungchul made a note in his mind.

‘Bertelgia. She can prove surprisingly useful at times.’

If what she had said was correct, it was time for some hands-on experience. Sungchul stood up from the stump, found a suitable branch, and brutishly snapped it off. It was about as thick as his arm, but it broke off like cornstarch block in his grip. He stripped off all of the straggling branches using nothing but the strength of his hand before pulling out his beginner blade from his Soul Storage.

The sword had been used extensively during his time in the Summoning Palace, but now it was a piece of junk which was simply taking up space inside his Soul Storage.

Sungchul held the sword over the flame that was burning underneath the cauldron until it had heated into a red color, then punched the blade with his fist to flatten it.

“Dear Lord...”

Bertelgia was speechless.

He looped the flattened metal around the branch a few times, using it to tightly secure smaller branches to it, creating a sturdy book holder. He embedded the book holder against the cauldron and placed Beginner’s Alchemy that even Ogres can follow on top.

“...Clap. Clap. Clap.”

Bertelgia couldn’t help but applaud as she looked over this spectacle.

Sungchul took a step back to observe his handiwork before he headed to the storage made of planks. The storage was locked shut with rusted chains, but it came apart as easily as cobwebs when tugged by Sungchul.

“You look as though you’ve done this often?”

Bertelgia teased carefully. Sungchul nodded at this and responded.

“It’s one of my few hobbies.”

“....”

There were countless ingredients placed on display. Bertelgia looked like a fish in water as she flew about taking a look around the storage. Sungchul couldn’t figure out how a book that had no nose, eyes, or mouth could observe the ingredients. On completing her examination of the materials, she returned to his shoulder.

“The ingredients aren’t preserved well, probably due to neglect. But it should still be possible to synthesize the lowest grade alchemical solution with them. Take this, this, and that for now. Yes. And that too.”

Sungchul picked out everything Bertelgia recommended and smelled them.

<Blindman’s Grass>

Level: 1

Grade: F

Attribute: Wood

Effect: None

Note: It is commonly seen along the roadside, but due to its stabilizing nature, it acts as a neutralizing agent to otherwise reactive ingredients.

‘They’re different ingredients from what I’ve dealt with before.’

There was a noticeable difference between being clueless and having a dabbling knowledge, especially in regards to generating interest in a subject; the latter carried a significant advantage over the former. His interest reignited with such vigor that Sungchul gathered some other ingredients to check their alchemic properties.

“It’s a good habit to smell as many ingredients as possible. Like a lion spares no effort when hunting a rabbit, a great alchemist would never overlook even the most common of ingredients!”

He managed to gather all the necessary ingredients during Bertelgia’s stream of encouragements and laid his jacket next to the cauldron placing the ingredients on top

‘Then, shall we begin?’

It was a rare moment of gentleness. Sungchul opened the textbook on his handcrafted book holder and chose an ingredient among those laid out before him.

“It is effective to remove the roots of the Blindman’s Grass before

synthesis. There are some impurities contained within the roots that hinder the neutralizing effects of the plant.”

Bertelgia continued to advise him by his side. Sungchul followed her instructions and carefully removed the roots of the dried Blindman’s Grass, and proceeded with a similar preparation procedure for the other ingredients. For example, a dried ingredient called ‘Flower of Happiness’ needed to have its stamen and pistil removed, and only the dark caps of Shadow Mushrooms were considered as useful alchemical ingredients.

“You’re quite good at preparing ingredients! I thought you were only good at smashing things.”

Bertelgia, who had been observing Sungchul while floating by his side, threw out a rare compliment. While preparing the ingredients, Sungchul realized how preparation for cooking and alchemy seemed extremely similar. Good ingredients were needed for good results, and dedication to cooking began from the preparation of ingredients.

Considerable time was devoted to preparing the ingredients before they were tossed into the cauldron. He then vigorously stirred the contents with a scoop. Mana continuously leaked out with each stir, and the alchemic cauldron filled with a vibrant light.

[Synthesis Success!]

A green liquid filled the alchemic cauldron. Sungchul filled an empty bottle with the green content and proceeded to examine it.

<Healing Salve>

Level: 1

Grade: E

Attribute: Wood

Type: Recovery Item

Note: It is effective when rubbed onto wounds.

A message popped up when Sungchul finished observing it.

[Congratulations! You have succeeded in your first synthesis as an Airfruit Alchemist student.]

Reward: Magic Power +1, Intuition +1

Sungchul’s eyes flashed when he saw this message.

“It raises magic power too? Not just intuition?”

“Of course. It takes magic power during synthesis. It isn’t as simple as just reading a book and understanding the theory.”

+1 Magic power and +1 intuition. It was an insignificant amount, but to Sungchul who had been thirsting for growth, it felt like finding an oasis in the middle of the desert.

He immediately opened the next page and attempted the alchemical process within, and with Bertelgia's assistance, he managed to complete it in no time. By the time the sun had reached its zenith, he had completed the volume and all of its assignments. It had only raised his magic power by five and his intuition by three, but Sungchul wasn't discouraged. There was a mountain of resources to be found within the tent.

Sungchul again entered the tent and found another book before turning to leave. The students, who were finally preparing to start their lessons of the day, saw this unfamiliar man wearing military fatigues and couldn't help but tilt their heads.

“Who is that guy?”

As all the students that were smoking marijuana had left, there was no one there to answer them. There was also no one to give it a second thought. While being ignored by the students and the professor of the school of Alchemy, Sungchul steadily plowed through the textbooks at a breakneck speed under the instruction and guidance of Bertelgia.

By the time the pothead students saw Sungchul again, they were shocked to see the book he held in his hands.

“W-what? He's already looking at Advanced Alchemy?”

Their disbelief was to be expected. The shabbily dressed man had been looking at the introductory textbooks for children just a week ago. And they couldn't help but be surprised that this same man was now referring to Advanced Alchemy after merely a week's time that even they wouldn't dare attempt to read.

“He's probably just pretending.”

A student said, looking unimpressed as he breathed out a puff of white smoke. With his reassuring words, the other students all laughed along in agreement.

“That must be it. How could that guy be looking at books that even we can't understand? Elementary Alchemy is decently easy, but even Intermediate Alchemy makes me shit blood when I try to read it.”

“Agreed. And beginning with the introductory level alchemy, knowledge of how to correctly use alchemical tools becomes necessary. How can anyone self-learn the proper use of the tools without an instructor?.”

Their professor, Basil Philrus, was still wasted on alcohol and lying naked in his room. More mindful students might have pitied Sungchul and taught him some basics, but no such students were left within the school of Alchemy. They could only conclude that this man was holding on to the Advanced Alchemy book for show. However, they had no way of knowing that the alchemic tools that had been gathered into a corner of the tent had disappeared and

that Sungchul had a much better teacher than some random alchemist.

“Good. Good. Pour it like that before squeezing out the rest. Though not too roughly!”

“....”

Sungchul carefully turned the centrifuge’s handle under Bertelgia’s guidance. As he could snap off the handle by being careless, he adjusted his strength as he cranked it to the highest possible speed and then noticed the liquid separating into two layers inside of the centrifuge.

“Good! Now use a mesh to filter out the upper layer!”

Under her guidance, Sungchul managed to fill a bottle with a clear white liquid. One of the benefits of being an Alchemist was being able to know the rate of success beforehand.

[Synthesis Success!]

He broke into a faint smile before taking a break. On the contrary to what the students believed, Sungchul had already comprehended Intermediate Alchemy and had taken a step into Advanced Alchemy.

His intuition and magic power each had risen over 50 within the week, and his only obstacle now was his lack of mana. He was synthesizing so frequently that he was running out of mana, which resulted in failed synthesis. However, this problem was easily solved by using the power of money. He began drinking expensive magic elixirs to restore his depleted magical power and continued with developing his alchemy.

Sungchul managed to grow beyond anyone's expectation, but it still wasn't enough to satisfy him. No, this was simply the beginning. Sungchul, whose magic power and intuition had exceeded 50, set his sights on the House of Recollection.

Chapter 39 – House Of Recollections (1)

Like the passage of time forming wrinkles on the human skin, old buildings would also gain bone-chilling ghost stories; these were like badges of honor for the structure that has stood for several centuries. It might have been inevitable that the House of Recollections, a building that had been erected over a thousand years ago, would be as much the focus of numerous unexplained wonders as the countless students who had passed through these doors. Not many students remained within the academy, and the vital flow of new admissions looked to have run dry, but seven ghastly rumors circled within the House of Recollections.

The first wonder was regarding the immovable door at the end of the basement hallway. According to rumor, it was a room used as a prison before the House of Recollections had been renovated into a dormitory, and the room in question had been used as a sinister torture chamber similar to other prisons. It is said that many of those who were tortured to death became poltergeists, wandering within the chamber ever since. Sungchul now stood in front of the focus of the first of these stories: The Immovable Door at the Basement.

[On the night of the waxing crescent and upon the stroke of midnight, rust water will flow like blood through the cracks of the immovable door, and a quest will begin.]

There was a note from Christian inside Sungchul's hand. He read over the note once again and waited for the rust water to flow from this infamous door.

After some time had passed, a dreary feeling crept into the air, and a slithering voice could be heard.

“Uh.... oo... oooo....”

It was a frightful wail, enough to make any weaker man form a beeline to the door.

“Can’t we... just turn back?”

Bertelgia, who appeared to be plenty scared, was dug deep into his pocket. On the other hand, Sungchul wasn’t bothered at all as he continued to observe the edges of this door. Bright red rust water soon began flowing from the door’s edges like blood.

Sungchul placed his hand upon the doorknob as though he had been waiting. There was a surprising chill that was surrounding it. He could see bright words appear from it soon after.

[What, pray tell, has compelled you to take hold of this doorknob?]

A list of choices followed.

[1. Curiosity]

[2. Courage]

[3. Foolhardiness]

Sungchul wanted to select the third option, but he chose the ideal answer as given to him by Christian, which was the first choice.

[Curiosity? Curiosity can be the flame of knowledge to brilliant mages, but be wary. Curiosity will often lead to death.]

Sungchul read through the words as he picked his ears.

After a moment, the rusty water, which had flowed out from the door, began to float up on its own and wrote out bright red words and symbols over the door as though it were written in blood.

[Answer me this: What is this magical formation trying to convey?]

There was only one purpose to the shape-shifting rust water: the examination of the challenger's capabilities. It especially examined the intuition. Sungchul would not have been able to understand the shapes of the rusty water a week ago, but he wasn't the same as before. He grasped the underlying pattern and meaning behind the dizzying motion of the rust water, and answered calmly.

“Fortune.”

As his voice rang out, the rusty water that had been dancing in the air burned away into nothingness, and another message appeared before him.

[You have the qualifications to enter the door.]

The door slowly began to open. What laid beyond this immovable door, feared by students as a torture chamber, now revealed itself to Sungchul. He felt slightly disappointed. There was a single devil tied down by metallic chains beyond the doors. It had a ram’s head and a bat’s wings, a human’s body, and a goat’s hooves. The devil had the identity of Baal.

He was known to be a grade higher than Barlog, but they had both met a similar fate without much difference to Sungchul’s hammer.

“Kekeke... a long awaited guest. You’ve come right in time. I was just about to grow bored of this and escape.”

The chained devil spoke. Upon closer observation, one of the devil’s eyes was blind, and his magic strength felt weak. He looked to have been captured after losing his strength due to a loss from a human or a devil.

Sungchul looked over the devil with uncaring eyes and spoke bluntly.

“... Let’s begin.”

A twisted smile formed on the devil’s lips and he laughed loudly. Dozens of chains that shackled his body shook with his every movement.

“A human with some spunk! Good. Let the Devil’s Game begin!”

A magical formation bloomed on the devil’s fingertips, and a single table appeared between them. A single die and three cups had been placed on top of the table. The devil turned the cup over and placed a die within before he began to mix the cups with experienced movements. Intrigue sparked in Sungchul’s eyes.

‘It’s a swindle.’

It had been written on Christian’s note that it would be a dice game, but Sungchul knew that it was a swindle.

“Now. The rules are simple. I’ll mix the cups, and you guess the location of the die. If you get the location correct, I’ll reward you.”

The Devil looked down upon Sungchul; arrogance in his eyes as he put forth his challenge.

“Do you accept?”

Sungchul nodded. As soon as he accepted, the devil’s hand that held the cups moved fluidly and tried to confuse the eyes. The die soon stopped, and the devil asked his question.

“Now. Which cup is holding the Die of Fate?”

It wasn’t a difficult question. Sungchul pointed towards the center cup. When the devil lifted the cup, it held the die.

“Pretty good. For a human, anyways. To be able to see through the great Crustes’s deception!”

The devil shook his fists as though he was frustrated. His chains shook violently and made a loud racket.

“However, a promise is a promise, so I’ll reward you.”

When the racket from the chains died down, the devil pointed his finger with a sharp nail shooting out towards Sungchul.

[What a great challenger! You have won the gamble against the devil Crustes!]

Reward: +1 Magic Power

As a devil, a race with a high affinity for magic, the reward wasn't intuition but magic power. It was quite insufficient for a gamble against a devil, but there was more to come. Crustes smiled and spoke amiably.

“Truthfully, I made a mistake this time around. It's been so long that my fingers got all twisted up. Why don't you try again? This time, I'll bet 2 of my magic power. Of course, you, a human, don't have to bet anything.”

A tempting offer. There was no reason to refuse. Sungchul nodded once again, and the second game soon began. The results was another victory for Sungchul.

‘As expected, it's just as Christian said.’

The devil imprisoned within the basement of the House of Recollections is one that had fallen to the human realm after being defeated during an internal fight amongst the devils within their realm. This devil, Crustes, was granted a secret space within the dormitory among students in exchange for helping mages, and led a pitiful life tricking students.

The devil's methods weren't that different from the traditional tricks that swindlers would use. He would lose a couple of games to the students to raise their greed and lower their guard before he devoured their souls through a single massive gamble.

[After the fourth game, please quickly escape from the room.
The devil will get extremely upset, if you don't!]

Christian warned him to only go as far as the fourth bet that didn't require any risks for the student. It was because the devil would require the students to bet some of the earnings after the fifth game.

“How could such a human thing happen! For Crustes to lose four times consecutively!!!”

The metallic chains shook loudly without reservation, and the devil's body trembled in anger.

“10 magic power. Let's put 10 magic power on the line for the next gamble! I can't let you leave like this!”

Sungchul had won exactly 10 magic power through the four matches. Even with the consideration that the stat was easy to raise due to its initially low number, but it wouldn't be an exaggeration to call it a top tier reward for a common quest.

‘Rather than calling it a common quest, it looks as though this is just simple gambling like the devil had said.’

Quests are a collection of trials and rewards created by those who are in control of the world, made with the blessings and permissions of Gods and those who act on behalf of Gods. Those

who created quests were referred to as the quest hosts, and the difficulty of the quest trials and the size of the rewards were relative to the strength of the quest host. Legendary existences, like that of the Seven Heroes, could create high-tier quests like objectives, but the lesser existences could only create quests that suited their level. However, this devil's gamble had an excessive reward to be considered as a low-tier quest. This meant that this quest was not set up like other quests, and was created in a way that could harm the quest host depending on its results.

“Now! Human! Do you dare gamble for 10 magic power? If so, come and try your luck.”

If Sungchul managed to win, he could earn another 10 magic power. It was an opportunity to gain 20 magic power overnight with no particular effort involved on his part. However, the devil would never deal in such a losing bargain.

“However, Not even I can give away this much for free. I have bet thus far, and now you must bet something as well.”

“What do you want me to bet?”

When Sungchul asked, the devil spoke with a sinister smile.

“What else do you have to bet, other than your soul?”

It was easy enough up until now for anyone could choose the correct cup by paying a bit of attention to the devil's sleight of

hand. An ignorant person might have been drunk on his winnings and stepped into this formidable challenge not knowing that this temptation would be his destruction.

“I’ll do it.”

However, Sungchul entered the game with an entirely different mindset than the others who have all been sacrificed to the devil. He crossed his arms and activated his Soul Contract-Eye of Truth as he observed the devil.

“You agreed?”

Slam!

The immovable door slammed shut. The room became dyed in a bloody hue. The devil smiled and laughed loud enough to blow off the roof.

“Shall we begin? Human? The final gamble, my 10 magic power or your soul?”

The devil’s hand that held the cups began to move. It was fast. It was a speed that was levels beyond the previous games as the die shot between the cups like a bullet, intending to confuse the eyes.

“Kehahaha!”

The devil broke into a lighthearted laughter, and he put in more speed. By the end, his hands and the cups began to move faster and faster until only the afterimage of it could be seen with the naked eye, and the wooden table began to burn from the sheer friction of his movements.

The hands stopped after some time while a portion of the table continued to burn. The devil looked down on Sungchul with his last remaining eye and oppressively asked him.

“Now, human. It is the time of destiny. Choose.”

The devil was laughing. It was impossible to choose correctly. It was because this was a gamble that couldn't be won even if the Goddess of Fortune was smiling upon the human. The die was not in the cups, but rather it was hidden inside the devil's grasp.

‘I'll get to dine on a human soul after such a long time.’

The devil was licking his lips in anticipation as he hurriedly waited for the decision.

“Now, human! Why hesitate? I don't have much patience, you know?”

At that moment, something the devil hadn't anticipated occurred. Sungchul grabbed the devil's wrist.

“Cease all movements.”

The last remaining eye of the devil shrank in terror.

‘H-how?!’

He couldn’t move his hand. It was something that had never happened before. Despite his status as a fallen devil who had lost his former strength, he was still an existence whose strength couldn’t be compared to that of an average human, but now it had been overcome so easily.

“Kuwaaaa!”

The devil’s hand felt like it was being crushed and he released his grip as he screamed in pain.

Roll.....

The die that had been hidden in his grip rolled onto the burning table.

‘W-what the... this bastard...’

The devil had finally realized it. The one who had been tricked in this gamble wasn’t the human, but rather himself. Sungchul stared at him with eyes that were more devilish than a devil’s and spoke firmly, using a heavy killing intent.

“Keep your promise, devil.”

“H-how could I refuse!”

Crustes gave up what few remaining magic power he had left to Sungchul. The message alerting of the quest’s success came up.

[]

Reward: +10 Magic Power

Seeing that the message was blank, the devil himself must not have expected to lose the 5th gamble. Sungchul quietly spoke to the devil who was staring at him wide-eyed.

“The next time I come to find you, it will be your funeral day.”

The chains that held the devil shook weakly. Sungchul could feel the devil’s terror through the meek noises from the chains as he stood at the door. The immovable door swung open, and Sungchul checked his stats as he left through the door.

[Stats]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Vitality 801 Magic Power 71

Intuition 58 Magic Resist 621

Resolve 502 Charisma 18

Luck 18

‘There are six remaining quests within the House of Recollections. I’ll tackle the Alchemy class books at the School of Alchemy during the day, and continue the quests inside the House of Recollections during the night. My time limit is a week. I’ll have to hit my goals within a week.’

It wasn’t a coincidence that Sungchul had managed to achieve such divine physical strength. He knew what he had to do to continue growing.

Chapter 40 – House Of Recollections (2)

Outside the Airfruit Academy campus, there was a store for magical tools with a carbuncle symbol. This store, which had been steeped deeply in history and had already been passed down for 8 generations, was now at risk of closing down due to the impending calamity and the degeneracy of the Airfruit Academy. The current owner, however, was currently standing slack-jawed.

“You... wish to buy all of this?”

He always believed that the infamous ‘whale’ was a stroke of fortune which only happened to others.

“Everything. How much will it be?”

The black haired summoned arrived without warning and brought with him enough profits to put him back in the black after suffering many years of losses.

“The total comes to 31 gold coins... but since sir customer is a regular, we’ll call it an even 30 gold coins.”

The man had bought 31 low-tier Magic Essence, which was more commonly known as Mana Drink. It was infamous for having a ridiculous price despite its actual effectiveness at recovering magic power, but this man had just purchased 31 of them. There were only 2 within the store’s inventory, but it was possible to get the other 29 through other stores and alchemists.

The man had previously purchased 11 of these mana drinks and just like then, no haggling had taken place; The man simply bought at the named price regardless of how high of a markup it had. This instance had been no different. The wholesale value of the 31 mana drinks that had been sold to the man was only valued at 12 gold coins. The owner had expected to leave plenty of room open for haggling, but the man hadn't even bothered with questions or complaint as he unhesitantly handed over 30 gold coins. The owner couldn't help but smile.

The man's gold coins were much more pure than the average gold coins, so its value would be much better than expected. Gold coins were generally impure alloys, and their value could also vary depending on their weight and purity.

“Then, if you'll excuse me.”

After the man left, the owner carefully examined one of the gold coins. It was unmistakable. It was a perfect gold coin with 99.9% purity. The owner's mouth fell open once again.

“Dang. What is it that he does for a living?”

He examined the other side of the coin to confirm its mint. That was because common coins have the mint site recorded, but the coin he now held in his hand had no such marks on it; an unmarked coin. He had no way of knowing its origins, as someone who only traded minor tools with average students, but there was only one faction who had the authority to produce unmarked

coinage in the Other World; The Merchants Coalition. They weren't as prominent, but their unending economic might and their information network of merchants made these hidden masters one of the great factions that reigned over Other World. The circulation of unmarked coinage was a topic they had a great interest in for a while now.

“The unmarked coin is being authenticated.”

It was late in the evening when the head of the Merchants Coalition Viceroy Horneko received the report regarding the unmarked coin. There was black bread and a block of butter on the table. It was a humble meal which didn't quite fit in with the image of the head of the Merchants' Coalition, who held the power to move mountains of gold at will. Viceroy Horneko chewed on the stubborn bread as he lazily looked to his aide.

“...is that right?”

He finished his meal as he listened to the report. After placing the butter on the black bread, he held some warm water in his mouth as he thoroughly chewed the buttered bread before downing it with the water. After completing his meal in this way, which was reminiscent of a cow rumination, Horneko finally opened his mouth.

“Where was the unmarked coin in question found?”

“It was the Golden City.”

“Golden City?”

One of Horneko’s brow shot up.

“Yes. Not only that, we also confirmed the information that several jewels we are familiar with have been authenticated within that district.”

“Unmarked coins followed by the gems...”

The gems could be considered as a coincidence but the unmarked coins, which had been securely locked away inside the Infinity Safe, being circulated could only mean one thing; The man who had emptied the Infinity Safe 8 years ago was active again within the human territories. They had lost him by a hair’s breadth last time, but they couldn’t afford to miss this opportunity again.

“Contact the Guild of Assassins. Tell them to gather their largest possible force. No questions will be asked regardless of the price.”

The reason for purchasing the mana drink in bulk was simple. The second hidden quest within the House of Recollections required a large amount of magic power.

On the desk of the currently empty House Head’s room, there was a precious orb, which reflected a dark unpleasant light.

“This... is this the Stone of Soul Absorption”

Bertelgia recognized the stone’s identity in a single glance and spoke.

“That must be it.”

Sungchul also knew this. There were some among the mages, who specialized against warriors, that carried this stone. The Soul Absorption Stone inside the House Head’s room was significantly larger than the ones he had seen, and its surface also looked worn as if to prove that it had been passed through the hands of countless students.

“Hm. Whether it is in the past or now, a place called ‘school’ will always be the same.”

Bertelgia popped out of Sungchul’s pocket as she spoke. When she noticed Sungchul’s lack of response, she spun around in the vicinity of the stone while continuing to speak.

“Even the school that I attended had a Soul Absorption Stone at every dormitory. You know, because a freshman with extraordinary magic power would come by from time to time. And to pick out those talented kids, they left the stone there. The real deal would end up breaking the stone with just their mana.”

“That’s what I’m also trying to do.”

Sungchul pulled out a bag from his soul storage. It contained the thirty magic essence within.

“This doesn’t seem right...”

Bertelgia drooped her body.

“This is a scam. A total scam!”

“...”

Sungchul didn’t pay heed to her words and instead placed his hand on the Stone of Soul Absorption. Accompanying the sensation of his magic power draining away was a bright message that appeared before his eyes.

[Welcome to Airfruit Magic Academy’s Magic Power Measurement.]

[You are currently touching a stone that drains magic power, called ‘the Stone of Soul Absorption’. If you experience a chill, dizziness, weakness in your legs, or fatigue, please remove your hand from the Stone of Soul Absorption immediately.]

“.....”

His vision became blurred. Sungchul immediately tossed back a

magic essence into his mouth. It amounted to something similar to a baby chick's tear, but he could feel his magic power reinvigorate immediately after it entered his body.

[Good! You possess great magical power. In that case, the measurement of magic power will now begin.]

[The Magic Power Measurement will continue for the duration of 5 minutes. The moment your hand is removed or your magic power is completely drained, the test will end.]

[The test will begin in 5... 4... 3... 2... 1...]

[Start!]

When the countdown ended, the stone began to intensely drain Sungchul's magic power. One of his hands remained on the stone while the other was busy emptying magic essence into his mouth. His magic power was simultaneously replenished as it drained away. White light began to fill the Stone of Soul Absorption as magic power came flooding in.

“This shouldn't be. This... shouldn't... be...”

Bertelgia stared wordlessly at Sungchul's method of solving the quest. The test came to an end when half of the 31 magic essence he had prepared were used up.

[Impressive! You wield powerful magic power which places you among the top 500. In other words, among the top 1%.]

[The 12th House Head of the Airfruit Academy, Mardiaestes extends a gift with respect towards the possessor of the most important talent: great magic power.]

Reward: Magic Power +5 , Intuition +5

It was a generous reward. But this still wasn't the end. Sungchul did not remove his hand from the Stone of Soul Absorption. The exterior of the Stone of Soul Absorption filled with milky light and began to grow turbulent.

[Is this still not enough?]

Sungchul held the magic essence in his other hand then nodded.

[That is fine. The true trial shall begin. However, the test from this point can be extremely dangerous, so please proceed under the supervision of the resident advisor of the dormitory.]

There was no resident advisor. Instead, there was only Bertelgia flapping beside him. When Sungchul looked over at her, she shouted with a relenting look.

“Begin!”

The test began in that moment. The stone began to absorb Sungchul's magic power at a rate incomparable to before.

“Eh? Isn't this dangerous?”

Bertelgia spoke out in concern, but Sungchul didn't take heed. He still had about 15 magic essence left. He consumed the essence every time his exterior mana was drained, and like a machine his mana replenished itself.

Slam! Slam! Slam! Slam! Slam!

In an instant, the clear sound of 10 empty bottles rang out over the top of the desk. Bertelgia, who was watching the scene froze in shock.

“Is... this something a person could do?”

With only 4 mana drink remaining the surface of the Stone of Soul Absorption finally began to crack. Sungchul drinking of mana essence also stopped.

[Impressive. You are the possessor of astounding magic power that only appears once every 10 years.]

[I congratulate the birth of a great magician who will carry the future of Airfruit, and pray for endless glory in the years to come.]

Reward: Magic Power +5, Intuition +5

He managed to get his hands on additional rewards.

For a time, the Stone of Soul Absorption and its related quest would not be available as it would take a considerable amount of time to restore a shattered Stone of Soul Absorption. However, Sungchul discovered a more urgent problem. He felt a familiar presence coming from beyond the door.

‘The lich girl. She must have caught onto my plans and came by.’

They were fated to meet again at some point. After all, the girl had been carefully observing everything that was happening within the dorm.

Sungchul shoved Bertelgia, who had been flying beside him, into his pocket and whispered to her.

“Keep quiet for a moment.”

“....”

She fidgeted once as to show her acknowledgement.

The figure outside the door was the person he had been expecting.

“Whatcha’ doing there?”

Her crystal blue eyes shot forth a piercing gaze, taking a peek at the scene behind Sungchul.

“I was performing a quest related to the Stone of Soul Absorption.”

There was no reason to make up a lie for something that was so obvious, so he spoke the truth. Hearing his explanation, Sarasa moved past him to look at the precious orb on top of the House Head’s desk.

“Ara?”

The surface of the Stone of Soul Absorption appeared cracked, like a field dried out by drought. Sarasa looked surprised as she turned to Sungchul.

“This... Was this your doing?”

Sungchul nodded, and Sarasa’s form wavered like a reed.

“How can this be?”

Sarasa placed a hand on the cracked orb and recited a spell in her mind.

‘Vision.’

Information showed itself to her in a visible projection between them.

<Those that have Shattered the Shell>

Mardiastes

Great Lagrange

Vitto

Armin Cruz

...

A familiar name appeared within the words that were scrolling away like the credit reel of a movie.

142. Altugius Xero

...

148. Leonard Sanctum

149. Sarasa Xero

And finally, Sungchul’s name appeared.

Sarasa stared piercingly at the name before turning towards Sungchul once again. A small magical formation appeared in her eyes which flickered with a cold and blue light.

<Sungchul's stats>

[Stats]

Strength 24 Dexterity 25

Vitality 26 Magic Power 81

Intuition 68 Magic Resist 21

Resolve 18 Charisma 18

Luck 18

“You’ve shattered the Stone of Soul Absorption when your magic power doesn’t even reach 100?”

This was impossible, in her mind at least. Sungchul seemed to sympathize with her, and tossed a small bottle in her direction. Sarasa instantly recognized the liquid within the bottle.

“This is... magic essence?!”

Sungchul nodded, and Sarasa finally looked at the rest of the

room. There was a massive amount of empty magic essence bottles which had been piled high on the House Head's desk.

‘My god... how much is this.’

Sarasa's eyes grew wide and a cold breath poured out from the innermost corner of her heart.

“This is a sham.”

Sarasa shook as she spoke.

“You're right. This is a sham.”

Sungchul spoke while looking back at her with indifferent eyes.

“But, it couldn't be helped. My teacher won't teach me any magic, so I could only conclude that I had to raise my stats regardless of the method.”

“T-that is...!”

Sarasa opened her mouth to speak but quickly shut it again. She was well aware of the situation Altugius Xero had fallen into.

Sungchul continued to watch her with passive eyes and spoke quietly.

“I’ll briefly go to visit the second floor. There is a quest there that I want to complete. I have no ill intentions, so you’re welcome to come observe from the side.”

“....”

Sarasa made no reply. Silence implies consent. Sungchul used the momentum of the situation to move past her and stepped onto the second floor’s stairs.

The area where the most powerful magic was concentrated in was Sarasa’s room.

‘She formed a wall with cryomancy.’

Sungchul moved past her room and headed towards the next quest’s location. The quests within the House of Recollection was infamous for its high difficulty and its degree of risk, but to Sungchul who was already familiar with both the strategies on overcoming them and the various contingency plans he could follow in case of mistakes, the obstacles didn’t amount to much.

Going to the School of Alchemy in the morning and the House of Recollection during the night, Sungchul continued to grind through this ebb and flow for a whole week. He looked at his status page as he celebrated his accomplishments with some of his personal cooking.



[Stats]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Vitality 801 Magic Power 130

Intuition 101 Magic Resist 621

Resolve 502 Charisma 18

Luck 18

Sungchul drained a shot glass in one go.

“Kaaa!”

The alcohol was sweet, especially after raising magic power which had been particularly difficult. When the beginner’s threshold of 100 was met, growth would naturally come to a halt. This was why he had to rely on alchemy so heavily despite completing all of the hidden quests within the House of Recollections. After full days of synthesizing he barely managed to raise his magic power by 1 or 2 until he finally met the goals he had set.

‘Should I slowly begin to move towards that place?’

He hadn’t received any positive news from Christian, but he had set his mind on returning to the Observatory of Cosmomancy after so long.

“Look who it is? Didn’t you decide on Alchemy? You must have come by because you were lonely without any friends. How sad... there doesn’t seem to be any friends here either.”

Leonard passionately greeted Sungchul when he returned to the Observatory, but he ignored Leonard completely as he entered. Altugius, who was obstinately sitting under a pillar with his back turned, took a quick peek before putting his head down to feign ignorance.

“....”

Once again, Sungchul took a seat next to the tower of books that had been haunting him and grabbed one. It was the thickest of the pile and was the one that had hurt his brain the most. Leonard began to taunt him while lying on his hammock.

“I’ll say this from the kindness of my heart. That book is not something a beginner like you can understand through brute force.”

The warning would have been better served much earlier, but things were different now. Sungchul was watching the words, which couldn’t be understood before, slowly form into something coherent.

“....”

The magic tome slowly lifted itself and opened before him.

Leonard's eyes grew wide in shock.

‘W-what... that bastard!’

Nothing could be hidden within the observatory, which was a place that amplified even the smallest of sounds. The book, that was now levitating in the air, began to turn its pages at a rapid pace. When the information within it had finished transferring over to Sungchul, Altugius turned his head and his aged face was full of astonishment.

‘No... that man...?!’

During that moment of shock, a small change appeared within Sungchul. The change was then manifested into physical form.

[You have broken through the basic tome of Cosmomancy:
Light that Shines through Stormy Clouds.]

[The Knowledge of the Skies and the Universe is now hidden
within you.]

Chapter 41 – Difficult Assignment (1)

Sungchul felt the new skill imbued to his body and took a moment to familiarize himself with it.

“Status window. Magic.”

[Magic]

1. Glare

Sungchul stared at the spell ‘Glare’ intensely. Eventually, a more detailed screen regarding the skill appeared.

[Glare]

Rank: 3

Type: Offensive Magic

Attribute: Null Attribute

Effect: Single Target Attack

Note: Calls down a Heavenly Light to burn your foes.

Even the most basic magic was categorized as a third rank. Was it more accurate to say that it was to be expected?

Sungchul was gripped by a compulsion to test out his new magic, but there was a problem that needed to be solved before he could do so: the people within the school of Cosmomancy.

“No... you. How did you do it? How... could you read that book?”

It was the first time that Altugius made such an expression of surprise. He even dropped the pipe in his mouth onto the floor from the shock, but there was another person who was even more surprised; that person was Leonard Sanctum.

“This is impossible. That man’s intuition was definitely at the level of some chimp...”

Immediately after he spoke, a magic formation unraveled within his pupils and Sungchul’s stats appeared before him. The new numbers only confirmed Leonard’s suspicions.

‘This is IMPOSSIBLE! His intuition is 101?! How did he manage to raise it so high? What kind of person is this?’

Altugius was also looking at Sungchul’s stats using a similar magic. Only praise escaped from his lips since this was a truly monstrous growth rate.

“W-what kind of sorcery is this?”

Altugius asked, and Sungchul replied with honesty.

“I synthesized at the school of Alchemy during the day, and performed quests within the House of Recollections during the night.”

It was an inadequate explanation, but the only truth that mattered was that he managed to achieve such rapid growth, regardless of what method that was actually used.

To this answer, Altugius spoke genuinely.

“Truly impressive.”

It was rare praise from Altugius, who was someone who usually kept silent on such matters. Leonard rolled his eyes. He pulled himself from the hammock and briskly stepped towards Altugius.

“Are you going to give your teachings to that bastard?”

His sharp voice echoed throughout the observatory. Altugius turned to face Leonard but ultimately decided to avoid his gaze.

“I haven’t said a single word on such matters.”

“Then, why did you hand over the basic tome to him? Out of so many books, why that one? Is there some conspiracy that I’m not aware of?”

Leonard's voice grew increasingly aggressive with every step he took towards Altugius. Sungchul, who was watching the scene, further solidified his impression that Leonard was not simply Altugius's disciple. He was acting more like a loan shark than a disciple.

‘According to Christian, Airfruit had already processed his expulsion once before. Though not only has this person set foot in the school again, but he's also harassing his professor. There must be a variety of forces at play here.

A building with a rotten foundation will eventually collapse, but there was no reason for Sungchul to step in. Nor was there a need for him to. Sungchul continued to observe the situation.

Leonard continued to press his so-called teacher while aggressively baring his fangs.

“This puts me in a difficult position, professor! Don't you already know that patience isn't my strong suit?”

Altugius didn't speak a word with his head facing the floor. When his teacher didn't appear to be responsive to him, Leonard let out a sigh and turned around. His bloodshot eyes locked onto Sungchul's figure.

“Hey, freshman.”

Leonard pointed a finger towards Sungchul, and when Sungchul

acknowledged him, Leonard spoke cheerfully with a sinister smile.

“I... I don’t like you. Do you mind just leaving?”

The words were brightly spoken, but they came interlaced with hidden threats.

“....”

Sungchul stared at Leonard with his mouth clenched. Leonard thought it foolish at first and laughed bitterly at the gesture, but the laughter didn’t last long.

‘W-who is this piece of shit?’

He saw an insignificant man, frozen in place and unable to say a single word, but he could also feel an intangible chill come crawling up his spine.

Leonard vehemently denied this feeling, but he couldn’t rid himself of his uneasiness. His insides began to boil in anger.

‘This is why I never liked those fucking summoned graduates.’

Unlike those that were born into this world, the summoned crawled through hell upon their arrival. No one could survive within that hell. This was why they would be more militant than the average Other-Worlder.

Leonard never liked the attitude of those summoned. He had to thoroughly step on them with enough oppressive strength to make sure they were never allowed to crawl up to him again. He smiled as he began to recall the faces of those arrogant fucks that had been killed by his hands.

“Haven’t you heard of me? What the Leonard Sanctum had caused within the Airfruit Academy? Perhaps it’s because you had no friends who could tell you?”

“I’ve heard that you’ve killed students in combat.”

The silent Sungchul finally opened his mouth, but his voice and expression were still quite indifferent.

Leonard chuckled as he nodded.

“You know of it? Then why are you looking at me with such a stiff back? Feelin’ cocky? Or maybe feelin’ brave? Or maybe you just don’t know how to act at all?”

“....”

“Well, either way, it doesn’t matter. I’ll give you a chance. If you disappear from my sight right this instant and I never catch you again, I’ll forgive you.”

Sungchul didn't even bat an eye at the blatant threat. He simply pointed his finger towards the exit. It was a gesture of challenge.

Leonard exploded in laughter. He grabbed his belly like a madman and roared in laughter for quite a while. As the observatory filled with his laughter, Altugius, who had been silent during this whole time let out a thick sigh.

“Leonard Sanctum.”

Altugius' voice rang out within the Observatory. Leonard continued laughing, but his eyes peeked over in Altugius's direction. Altugius spoke again.

“I don't believe you've received a full pardon yet.”

Leonard's laughter was cut short. Instead, his bloodshot eyes glared at his own teacher with murderous intent.

“I've received a full pardon, from my second professor, the Head of the school of Pyromancy.”

“I believe the Head of Cryomancy has opposed to your pardon.”

“That school does not represent our academy.”

Leonard replied, becoming agitated. In contrast, Altugius remained calm and collected as he answered.

“Isn’t it also true, that the school of Pyromancy does not represent our academy?”

Leonard, who heard the rebuttal, let out a short outburst.

“Are you taking that fucker’s side?”

He pointed towards Sungchul. Altugius held his expression as he replied with a soothing voice.

“I’m just concerned about you.”

That single phrase defused Leonard’s explosive anger. Altugius continued to speak.

“You’ve finally managed to return to school, and you’re going to throw it away over this small incident? Aren’t you a prodigal existence within the Airfruit academy blessed with the ability to wield two markings and have [broken the shell](#)?”

Shell here is the stone of soul absorption. If you remember his name had popped at 148 last chap in the list of those, who had broken the stone of soul absorption.

Leonard’s fierce eyes softened at the rare praise from his teacher, but he sharply threw out a question as he took a step back.

“Then why won’t you show me the [path of the school of](#)

Cosmomancy?”

Path of the school of Cosmomancy: Korean derives a lot of its vocab from Chinese, and so the term can have multiple meanings when traced back to its roots. Here, the word used means path but it can also mean hidden arts or secret tome as well. We went with the meaning more commonly used. We will ask the author on it and update if a change is required.

“It is simply not time yet.”

Altugius had led the conversation with such skill until that point. His final answer felt vague and insincere.

Leonard, who had been hesitating, felt like cold water had been thrown over him once again.

‘What a fucking lip service.’

However, his fire had also died down. He no longer had the desire to make things any worse than it was.

“Well, I understand your desires. It looks as though I was too fired up. I apologize.”

Leonard approached Sungchul after a half-assed apology and held up his hand with a big smile as if nothing had happened.

“Ah, I’m truly sorry about this, Mr. Freshman. I just have a fiery

temper at times. Let's just let bygones be bygones with a shake."

"...."

Sungchul only stared at Leonard's hand. Leonard showed a surprised expression with a playful whistle before retracting his hand; he then continued to loiter around his hammock.

"You didn't look so petty~"

It was meant to provoke, but Sungchul couldn't be ignited by such an insignificant person. He only had a single desire at this moment, to try out his newly learned magic.

Sungchul gave a full bow towards Altugius, who had returned sitting with his back turned, and left the Cosmomancy building.

As soon as the door shut, Leonard spoke towards Altugius.

"Now that I think about it, I really need to chase that guy out."

Altugius simply shook his head.

"Combat... especially Gauntlet isn't allowed. If you start a Gauntlet with the fellow, the forces within Cryomancy will attack you and your second professor. Isn't that against what your true teacher wishes for?"

Leonard made a sinister smile at Altugius's words as he lightly swung his body on the hammock.

“My true professor is only Professor Altugius. Professor Fregius of the school of Pyromancy is a good man and my savior, but isn't he a bit lacking to guide me along the true path of magic?”

Altugius didn't reply. Leonard continued to speak through the silence.

“I have no intention to start a Gauntlet. I thought of a better method. A peaceful and a legal method.”

“What are you planning?”

Altugius caved in to curiosity and asked Leonard, who put on a satisfied expression and replied.

“I'll get rid of his place here.”

Leonard's gaze fell somewhere far away.

The first magic of the school of Cosmomancy: Glare. It was an offensive type spell that summoned a Heavenly light that burned away all enemies in sight. Sungchul dressed a scarecrow with an old abandoned suit of armor from the dorm so that he could test out his newly learned magic in the backyard of the eerie House of

Recollections, which was visited by none.

The method to use magic lay instinctively within his mind. First, he thought of the spell he wanted to cast, then of its complex formations which he had seen within the magic tome, and finally, he thought of the words that could be understood but not explained, which flew through his mind like the gears of a clock conjuring the power of magic. After the preparations had been completed, and the spell's name was shouted out vocally or mentally it could then finally be activated.

This entire process was called the Aria. The time it took to complete an aria differed from spell to spell, and the wording of the aria varied greatly as well. The aria of Sungchul's first magic, Glare, was short enough to be called instantaneous.

‘Should I give it a try?’

The magic formation passed through his mind as though he had hit fast-forward, and his intuition alerted him when the spell was ready. Sungchul looked at the suit of armor he had placed 25m away and recited the name of the spell in his mind.

‘Glare.’

In that instant, a beam of light burst from his fingertip. The pillar of light accurately landed on the chest region causing black smoke to rise.

“ ... ”

Sungchul witnessed the prowess of his magic by looking through the suit of armor as he could see a coin sized hole that was at the ‘heart’ of the armor. It was a monumental first experience with magic, but Sungchul didn’t rate it so highly.

“Shit!”

It was weak. Significantly so. It would be difficult to even imagine killing the King of Demons, Hethnius Max, by using magic of this caliber. His opponent was a magician that could freely wield 6th rank spells and also had a considerable magical resistance. Glare might barely be enough to singe his skin.

Sungchul wouldn’t be satisfied with this first bite. He quickly changed his attitude. It was more than just greedy to expect his first magic to split the mountains and the oceans. Looking at it objectively, his magic power and intuition only just surpassed beginner levels, and Glare was a low tier magic that didn’t exceed the third circle of spells. It might look weak in the eyes of Sungchul, who was called the Enemy of the World, but it would be plenty useful in the eyes of the average person.

It had a powerful advantage of having a short aria, allowing it to shoot a burst of light instantly, which would make it difficult to dodge. With good accuracy, it could be used to give consistent damage to an enemy or even suppress them under a barrage of fire. Magicians had the unique characteristic of being able to grow their magic’s efficacy relative to their magic power stat. If he could raise his magic power, he would also be able to pour out a much more

destructive beam of light.

In conclusion, it looked weak now, but it had the potential to be his main form of attack when his magic power grew. Sungchul finally concluded something along these lines.

‘It is a spell that is bound to become more useful as I raise magic power.’

He tried a dual casting of glare as well. It was to test the main ability of his class: Echo Mage. For whatever reason, the echo had not rung out. He recalled Vestiare’s voice and conjured the echo with more strength, but it ended after a single cast. However, the reason for his inability to utilize echo appeared before him as in response to his conjuration.

[A voice without a soul cannot hold an echo.]

Sungchul could vaguely understand the explanation after looking at the message.

‘Could it be that I’m still lacking in magic power?’

A small voice cannot produce an echo. Only a thundering voice from the top of a mountain could make an echo that would stir the entire mountain range. Sungchul’s current magic power could be compared to a whisper in term of volume. His current state was

like taking his first steps compared to Vestiare of the Seven Heroes. The true strength of an Echo Mage would only reveal itself through further training and growth.

‘This is but the start. Let’s not rush it.’

Sungchul calmed his briefly excited heart. A clutter of problems returned to his mind when he regained his calm. One thing that he needed to do also came to mind.

Sungchul cleaned up his surroundings and left Airfruit campus towards Golden City’s downtown. He planned to go meet Christian who he hadn’t seen in a while.

Chapter 42 – Difficult Assignment (2)

As shadow accompanies light, dark alleys also lay within the shimmering Golden City. Slave Street was one such back alley. A crowd of slavers were putting up their slaves for auction just as Sungchul stepped into the dirty plaza. He passed by the auctions and watched the faces of the slaves out of the corner of his eyes.

A familiar head of black hair. They were a part of the mass summoning which had brought them to the Other World. Their eyes, lacking intellect, looked at their potential owners with dull gazes. Sungchul left the auction house looking bored.

When Sungchul left the auction house a street filled with thugs, beggars, and prostitutes opened up before him. He sought out a particular store and headed towards it. It was a glamorous inn with a sign that read, ‘Palace of Pleasures’. Christian was spending a joyous time surrounded by several beauties in a room inside the Palace of Pleasures.

“Oh, my! Look who it is? It is Sir Warrior!”

Christian, who was thoroughly drunk, greeted Sungchul with a loose smile on his face.

“You’ve come at the right time. Please sit over here. There are beauties for everyone!”

He began to scold the women with fake anger in his voice.

“What are you doing? Take care of Sir Warrior!”

“Send them all away.”

Sungchul spoke briefly, but with force. Christian tactfully judged that Sungchul was not in a good mood. He hurriedly sent out the girls, then stammered with a different attitude while fidgeting with his prosthetic hand.

“Uh... regarding Professor Altugius’s book... I am looking into it, through someone knowledgeable at Logotete’s side.”

“I’m done with that.”

Sungchul raised a glass of the alcohol on the table, then frowned.

“Is it not to your tastes?”

“I can’t even tell the number of different spits mixed in here anymore. It looks like this establishment mixes leftover alcohol, so unless you’ve got guts of steel, stay away from the drinks.”

“I-I’ll keep that in mind.”

“And I came by to learn about another topic.”

Sungchul wanted to hear detailed information about the person called Leonard Sanctum. When he first heard about Leonard, Leonard had been a secondary problem, but it had quickly become his primary concern. Christian, who had been depressed, revitalized as though he was confident about the topic.

“Ah, Leonard Sanctum. I know plenty about that son of a bitch.”

Christian frankly spoke from his conclusion.

“That bastard is suspected of being a Follower of Calamity.”

“Follower of Calamity?”

Sungchul’s eyes lit up.

“That’s right. He has Professor Fregius of the school of Pyromancy supporting him, and Fregius is already publicly known as a Follower of Calamity.”

“I want to hear more.”

It had been quite a while since Sungchul had an enemy within Airfruit Academy. It was about time that he dug into the situation behind the school. Christian explained the current situation within Airfruit Academy exactly as he had heard of it.

According to Christian, the rapid decline of Airfruit Academy

ultimately began with the death of Headmaster Magnius three years ago. When the headmaster in charge of the school disappeared, Fregius and Robert Danton, both respective heads of the schools of Pyromancy and Cryomancy and also the most powerful forces within the school, began fighting to fill the vacancy.

If one side had been able to oppress the other completely, it would have ended with a few small incidents, but it was as if a tiger had been pit against a dragon; They were both equally matched. Time continued to slip away as their feud grew deeper in the endless rivalry, and during this time, the school's ability to function had fallen to the wayside. Rumors that the school was teeming with the Followers of Calamity also sprung up around the same time. And another rumor, one that said the Followers of Calamity had killed the headmaster also began to circulate, with the true killer never being found.

“...Leonard Sanctum is THAT Fregius' main disciple. He was originally under Altugius, but after he was expelled under dubious circumstances, he began to follow Fregius. As Fregius is the ringleader of the cult residing within the academy, it could only follow that Leonard must also be a Follower of Calamity.”

“I see.”

He understood the gist of it. And of how the atmosphere of Airfruit Academy truly was. He suppressed an urge to vomit from the sheer repulsion he was feeling.

“Ah. There's one more interesting tidbit.”

Christian carefully gauged Sungchul's reaction.

“Spit it out.”

“It's not confirmed, but they say that Professor Altugius has a huge debt to Professor Fregius.”

“Debt?”

“That's right. I don't know the reason, but the rumor is that it is quite an astronomical debt. They say it is because of this, that Professor Altugius cannot oppose Professor Fregius. Well, it is still just a rumor in the end.”

“I see.”

He had everything he wanted. Sungchul finally rose from his seat.

On the table, there was a large pile of gold coins that Sungchul put out. He grabbed one and examined it. Coinage without a mint – Unmarked currency. He looked at the coin with disinterest before he left the room.

“Excuse me, Sir Warrior. Are there no other orders?”

“Make a list of everyone within the Airfruit campus suspected of

being a Follower of Calamity.”

“Followers of Calamity... It’s a difficult ask, but this Christian will devote his all to this task, Sir Warrior.”

Sungchul held out a gem for gratuity, and Christian received it happily with both hands.

“Send the Sky Squirrel if anything happens.”

“I understand!”

As he left the room, decadent lights were dizzying, but what truly befuddled him were not the lights, but the situation ahead. He couldn’t see an easy path to obtain the knowledge behind Cosmomancy. In order to expend all of his effort to unravel such a difficult problem, he would need to resolve the issue with the Followers of Calamity quickly. Especially Leonard and his cabal. However, he could meet an undesirable result if he was to approach this situation rashly. The Followers of the Cult were a vile group, akin to a reptile with many heads. If he wanted to strike, he needed to cut off all the heads at once. Otherwise, there was a chance he might be bitten by the poisonous fangs of a remaining head.

‘The known Followers of Calamity members are Leonard and Fregius, but there are bound to be more of them hidden within the school. An influential person must be leading the cult.’

Sungchul was the reaper of the Followers of Calamity. He knew his enemy's exact methods. The first ironclad rule for dealing with the Followers of Calamity was to suspect everyone. Altugius himself might be a Follower. Sungchul knew not to hesitate even in such circumstances.

At the same time, several magicians had gathered within the House of Recollections to perform a ritual. The person at the center of the magical formation was Sarasa Xero. Her body wasn't covered with the usual thick robe, but only a light, thin nightgown. She was allowing the spells the mages chanted to slowly seep into her body.

“....”

Altugius looked upon his granddaughter with a worried gaze. Sarasa, who lay there with her eyes closed, felt her grandfather's gaze and briefly winked at him. As the spell that came pouring into her grew even stronger, she couldn't resist furrowing her delicate brows and clenching her eyes. Altugius deeply furrowed his own brows. A man standing near him spoke in a soft voice.

“You do not need to concern yourself. There will be a brief moment of pain, but your granddaughter's loveliness will be preserved for eternity.”

There was the clear image of a skull drawn on his robe. He was a necromancer and knew of methods to stop the decomposition of the dead. He offered his services in exchange for a small fortune or

gifts. Until now, Sarasa's appearance had been maintained by their mage craft.

"Mm... it appears that the payment is a bit light?"

Like a ghost, the necromancer knew that the payment was lacking by the weight of the coin pouch. Altugius felt a cold sweat trailing down his spine.

"Let's see here... You're lacking 3 entire coins. May I ask what is the reason for this?"

"T-that is... I'll give you what I'm lacking the next time we meet."

The necromancer's response was apathetic. He looked at Altugius callously as if he was looking at a corpse, and spoke perfunctorily.

"If I recall, this happened once before. I trusted in the professor's reputation and overlooked the matter, but if the problem continues to present itself, I suggest you look into other necromancers."

Unfortunately, the other necromancers would not help Altugius. That was because they were all affiliated with the rising star, Logotete Magical Academy. He would be falling out with the Logotete-affiliated... no... all of the necromancers within the entire Golden City if things turned awry with this man.

“I will try to prepare the missing amount as quickly as possible.”

Despite his own pride, Altugius lowered his head to a necromancer from a rival school. The necromancer looked upon the bowed Altugius with disinterest then nodded with an unsatisfied expression.

“This is the last time. Any more of this, and you leave us in a difficult position.”

The ritual continued as expected. The preservation magic upon Sarasa’s body regained its original vigor, and her appearance would retain its original form for a short duration. However, this would be the final time. Altugius needed money. Lots of money. There was only one way he could earn a lump sum within a short amount of time. He sought out a man that he never wanted to meet again. The figure wearing a crow mask dressed in immaculate white judge’s robes.

The man, looking out a window at the sun with his hands held behind his back, felt Altugius approaching him and turned to speak in a gentle voice.

“Did you finally resolve to save the school?”

The man’s identity was the Heresy Inquisitor Magnus Maximus. He was the man who had been sent to investigate the rumors of heresy surrounding Airfruit Academy and was known to resort to any method when it came to eradicating heresy.

“Are you going to the school of Alchemy?”

Bertelgia popped up from his breast pocket and spoke. Sungchul nodded and said.

“I’ll be spending time within the school of Alchemy for the time being.”

Leonard Sanctum was bound to be waiting at the school of Cosmomancy to pick a fight with him. Sungchul wouldn’t avoid such a fight, but there was also no reason for him to create any more problems through conflict. It wouldn’t be too late for him to act after the information regarding the Followers of Calamity had been gathered.

“Great choice!”

Bertelgia within his pocket trembled slightly as she brightly said.

“Yesterday, I’d noticed that your spells looked wimpy as hell due to you lacking magical power, and I thought that there was a need to train up your magic power by spending a lot of time at the school of Alchemy.”

“I doubt it’ll go up by that much.”

He had managed to raise his lacking magic power from the

threshold of 130 magic power through the manual labor known as synthesis, but his growth rate had plummeted after breaking through 100. Ineffective growth was the opposite of what he sought.

“Growth by synthesizing is too slow compared to the amount of effort required.”

“That’s what a bad student would say.”

Bertelgia retorted immediately.

“There are innate levels for all alchemic items, you know? Your growth rate is garbage when you keep making low-level alchemic items, but you’ll get faster growth with higher level items!”

“Is that right?”

“Yes! The downside is that ingredients are hard to come by... and also expensive... but...”

Sungchul couldn’t obtain ingredients that were hard to find, but cost was not a problem. He decided to try his hand at synthesizing high level alchemical concoctions which Bertelgia had mentioned when he got back to the school of alchemy. However, he witnessed something completely unexpected when he arrived at the site of the school.

“....”

The tent for the school of Alchemy had vanished.

Chapter 43 – Difficult Assignment (3)

Sungchul discovered familiar faces gathered behind the ingredient storage house . It was the Professor of Alchemy Basil Philrus and his students. Around this time, they would usually be sleeping or smoking pot, but they were gathered in the empty plot with lost faces as though they had lost their homes. Sungchul approached them.

“What happened here?”

No one answered. They only sighed with their heads down towards the floor. Sungchul asked once again, directing his question towards Basil this time, hoping to get an actual answer.

“What in the world happened here.”

The man who would be sleeping in the nude wore proper attire this time around. He looked up at Sungchul with a dejected expression on his face and spoke bitterly.

“Our school received a notice to disband.”

“Disband?”

The complete story was this; The school of Alchemy, at some point in time, turned into a form of garbage dump of students that had been rejected from other schools within Airfruit. The quality of students and the quality of the educator reflected this fact.

Sungchul was fully aware of this. The school of Alchemy rapidly declined and couldn't show any results as the final person with any form of renown, Philrus's predecessor, died. They had simply been waiting for the day they would be kicked and be forced to disband. Sungchul had arrived on that fated moment.

“Professor, we aren't truly disbanded yet.”

A female student with thick dark bags under her eyes looked at her teacher and spoke with a sad voice.

“That's true. It isn't final yet, but that will only remain true for the week!”

Basil began pulling at his hair dejectedly.

“What will happen if the decision for disbandment finalizes?”

Sungchul asked.

“I'll be kicked out for one, and my students that can't find another guidance counselor will meet the same fate.”

“We'll get kicked out too. Only kids that have been rejected are gathered here.”

The female student with bags under her eyes spoke frankly, and Basil scratched his head in agreement.

“As long as something short of a miracle doesn’t occur.”

Sungchul’s eyes lit up at those words.

“So, there is a way.”

He could resolve their financial problems if nothing else, but the ‘solution’ that Basil spoke of was unexpected.

“It’s in regards to what the Emergency Management Committee talked about... They said they would disregard the disbandment if our school of Alchemy manages to produce some satisfactory final result.”

“Something satisfactory?”

It didn’t look easy.

Reluctantly, Basil continued speaking.

“That’s right. They require an alchemic item that is of the 5th level, minimum. Embarrassingly... there isn’t anyone among us that is capable of such a feat.”

It was at that exact moment when Sungchul’s breast pocket began to thrash about violently. Bertelgia vigorously vibrated her body like a cellphone on vibrate. She wanted to speak.

Sungchul excused himself before moving to a quiet location when Bertelgia shot out of his pocket, as though she had been waiting for this moment, and blurted out words that had been held back for so long.

“What? They can’t make a measly 5th level item? Phew, what kind of idiots are they?”

Bertelgia was fuming.

Alchemic items synthesized through a cauldron differed from other items due to their varying innate levels. That level was categorized from 1 through 9 with 1 being the lowest and 9 being the highest. However, the highest grade alchemic item synthesized by humans was known to be of level 7, but no alchemist who could produce that even existed. Along that line of thinking, it might appear as though level 5 was a mid-grade alchemic item, but in reality, its relative quality was quite high. The Emergency Management Committee didn’t commission the school of Alchemy to produce a 5th level item for just any reason.

“Sigh... Pathetic. Truly pathetic. How could a big-name school like this not have an Alchemy professor that could synthesize a fifth level item? This is ridiculous.”

Bertelgia appeared to be upset for some reason. Sungchul only looked upon the situation with amusement.

“So, do you have some method to solve this?”

“Of course. I am a codex of alchemic knowledge. I would obviously have something up to level 5 recorded in me!”

Bertelgia flipped through some pages with various alchemic items as if to prove her statement, but he couldn't understand any of it. He only realized that he lacked intuition as he grew more adept with magic tomes, and shook his head.

“Unfortunately, I can't understand any of your pages.”

“Ah~ How high is your intuition? Just over 100, right?”

He nodded.

“Mmm... It'll be hard to decipher for you then. In that case, I'll tell you the recipe directly. Although... I'm not supposed to, as the guide of the Creationist!”

“Ah. There was such a thing as a Creationist, wasn't there?”

He had put it out of his mind after completing Eckheart's quest.

“What? Have... have you forgotten about it? Forgotten that you're walking on the path of the Creationist?!”

Bertelgia dropped out of the sky, seemingly from trauma, then popped back up before she hit the ground. She rose to Sungchul's eye level and flapped her pages.

“Isn't it enough that I remembered now?”

“Really... how can anyone be so rude! Whatever! Doesn't matter! Whether you walk the path of the Creationist or not, I have no obligation to force you as a guide.”

Bertelgia looked peeved, but she did her job as expected of her.

“Anyways, I'll list some 5th level items that I know of which seems possible for you to make. Pick one that seems right for you.”

Bertelgia listed names of some alchemic items. Candlestick of Twilight. Rainbow Ingot. Buoyant Crystal. Alchemic Bomb (Dark), Medicine of Elfir. There was a total of 5 alchemic items. Even the almighty Sungchul had only heard of the Buoyant Crystal.

“What's the easiest among these?”

“Well, they're all pretty tough honestly. You're going to have to prepare yourself for a lot of failures. I only recommended these because their ingredients are easily accessible.”

As Bertelgia had said, 5th level alchemic items weren't so readily

synthesized. The gathering of ingredients could be overcome through the power of money, but each item also required a distinct high-level alchemic technique. For example, the characteristic of the Candlestick of Twilight required a unique crafting method from the Alchemist, the Rainbow Ingot required a deep knowledge of heat, and Alchemic Bomb (Dark) required dexterous handwork along with proficient experience with weight scales. The rest of the items had similar problems. Each required a unique skill.

“Which will you make?”

Sungchul thought on it for a while before choosing the Alchemic Bomb (Dark) in reply. He thought it would be easier to ‘appeal’ to the upper echelon through force.

“Alright! Then let’s go tell those fools! We will make the item, but the idiots will have to request the procedures for an assessment!”

Sungchul revealed his plans with a firm voice to those waiting in front of the tent.

“I seek to begin making a 5th level alchemic item now. It’ll take a week from now. I only ask that you put in the request for judgement to the Emergency Management Committee.”

“What? You are going to make a 5th level alchemic item?”

Basil, who seemed to lack the will to hold himself up, suddenly

perked up at the news.

“That’s right. I want to give it a go.”

“It hasn’t even been a month since you entered the school of Alchemy. 3rd level... no... Why not give a 2nd level item a try? At the very least, I don’t remember telling you about such an item.”

“A knowledgeable person I know is quite the alchemist. I am receiving personal tutelage from that person.”

“Mmm...”

Basil looked as though he thoroughly disapproved of the plan, but nodded instead.

“I understand. Leave the request to me, but remember this, the judges that will be sent from the Emergency Committee will be the professors of Pyromancy and Cryomancy. Playing a prank with those people will be very dangerous.”

Basil made it clear that he would make the request, but the name on the request would be Sungchul’s. It meant he would take no responsibility for this incident.

Sungchul simply nodded.

“It doesn’t matter.”

He then headed on the path towards the city center of the Golden City with Bertelgia and sought a store for alchemic ingredients.

“Give me everything.”

Sungchul not only took the ingredients for the Alchemic Bomb (Dark) but the ingredients for the remaining four items as well. It was just in case the production of Alchemic Bomb did not turn out as expected. He had to expend a small fortune, but he had plenty left.

He bought out some other viable ingredients at the store before heading back to the school. The Alchemy students lounging beside the storage were already popping off their wine bottles during midday. There was also a thick musk of marijuana present in the air . Basil, who should be leading these students, was laughing and enjoying himself among them.

Sungchul overheard their conversations despite his lack of interest; they were mostly lowbrow humor regarding sex. He pulled out a table that had been stored, laid a tablecloth on top, then arranged the various purchased alchemic ingredients and the required tools.

“Shall we begin, then?”

Bertelgia spoke confidently from the breast pocket.

“Right. What do I have to do first?”

“You should prune the porous seeds from the Firecracker Tree first.”

Sungchul picked up the seed covered with thick hair among the ingredients on the table. It was about the size of a peach seed, and it felt rough. He held the seed to his nose and smelled it. It generally had the distinct vegetative aroma, but there was also a smoky smell of gunpowder underneath.

<Porous seed of Firecracker Tree>

Level: 4

Rank: C

Attribute: Tree

Effect: Explosion upon impact or contact with flame

Note: Seed of the Firecracker Tree originating from the Great Meadow of East. Once the seed ripens, it grows more explosive until it self-detonates. This spreads the spores over long distances.

A single one of these seeds required 20 silver coins. The price was small potatoes to Sungchul, but it was enough to match a month’s wage for an Airfruit Academy staff.

“Delicately grab the seed’s shell and mark the exterior with the knife, then we need to extract the explosive extract contained

inside.”

Sungchul quickly began his work.

“Careful. It could explode. This guy is dangerous enough to take a finger with a single slip.”

Bertelgia warned him to be careful, but the knife work of the master chef, Sungchul, was relentless. He smoothly handled the seed despite his inexperience with this foreign ingredient and extracted thick grains of red contained within.

‘He’s good. This guy.’

Bertelgia was slightly touched. She had felt it before, but the way Sungchul handled the ingredients was not normal. The porous seed of the Firecracker Tree was difficult for even properly educated alchemists to handle.

“What’s next?”

“Uh...we just use the mortar to turn it into powder, but it’s easier if you prepare five seeds worth of extracts at a time before powderizing it.”

Sungchul immediately moved onto the next step. He handled the seeds with extremely precise dexterity, and there were five seeds worth of extract within the mortar.

“Should I powderize it now?”

“No! You can’t JUST powderize it. You need to make and add a counteragent beforehand.”

“A counteragent... you mean the thing we made with the Grass of the Blind?”

Bertelgia shook once forcefully within his breast pocket, and he immediately reached for the Grass of the Blind. Bertelgia stared carefully at his fingertips at this moment.

‘I definitely told him to prepare the ingredients before adding them. Should I watch and see if he does it properly this time?’

Sungchul was lighting the fire under the alchemic cauldron and pouring the distilled water. It was common sense up to this point. What was important laid after.

“ ... ”

He once again grabbed the Grass of the Blind that he had picked out and looked at it carefully until he eventually began the process of pruning the roots and the dried ends of the grass.

‘Gasp! He’s actually doing it right! This person!’

It was all beyond her expectations.

Chapter 44 – Difficult Assignment (4)

It was a peculiar thing. Seeing a man who looked a world apart from the words ‘diligence and perfection’ preparing each ingredient so naturally. Sungchul carefully placed the pruned Grass of the Blind and the other prepared ingredients into the alchemic cauldron and diligently stirred it with a wooden spoon. Soon, a neutralizing agent with a green tint began to form.

“Do I have to pour this into the mortar?”

“Y-Yes! Use about 3 alchemic spoons worth.”

“....”

Sungchul added the neutralizing agent into the mortar, and he began to carefully crush the softened Firecracker Tree seed extracts with a pestle. After five minutes had passed since the process began, the dampness from the neutralizing agent evaporated away leaving only the red colored powder within the mortar.

“Is this enough?”

Bertelgia shook once in reply to Sungchul’s question.

“Yep. It’s enough. Next, we’ll be using the scales.”

“The scales.”

Sungchul looked at the scales with a pensive expression. It wasn't a tool he was familiar with.

“Alchemic bombs are a type of tool that requires very specific amounts of materials. That's why it won't do without a very precise scale capable of detailed measurements, you know?”

Bertelgia had a few more thoughts that she kept to herself.

‘He couldn't possibly do something crazy like succeeding in one go, right? I don't know about the other tools, but the scale isn't a tool that's easily handled with beginner's luck!’

The process of measuring with the scale began. Sungchul gently poured the red powder onto one arm of the scale, then judged the weight by hanging the counterweight on the other arm. It went slowly as it was his first time, but he approached it with focus and precision.

“Now, next?”

Bertelgia stared intensely at the swaying scale. It was a decent result with no outstanding flaws. She didn't want to admit it, but she could see that Sungchul had the dedication to detail that was the core virtue of all alchemists.

However, the final step of synthesising the Alchemic Bomb

(Dark) resulted in failure despite his innate talent.

Boom!

Sungchul detected large quantities of his mana draining away and drank magic essence to replenish it, but his focus wavered during the most critical moment causing the entire process to fail.

[Synthesis Failure!]

A groan escaped from Sungchul's lips. He had not blinked at most situations, but it took an unexpectedly heavy toll to expend so much mana and concentration to synthesize a high-level alchemic item.

‘For someone on my level to struggle this much... Alchemy isn't something to take lightly.’

The students that were enjoying their booze besides the storage began to look over his direction. They pointed at the alchemic cauldron with black smoke trailing out, and started laughing out loud.

“Whew... those idiots. Why do they choose to live that way?”

Bertelgia muttered angrily, but Sungchul was different.

‘I don’t know why, but it feels as though my intuition has increased. This fatigue reminds me of the exhaustive high after a drawn-out battle.’

He immediately pulled up his status screen to check his stats.

[Stats]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Vitality 801 Magic Power 132

Intuition 103 Magic Resist 621

Resolve 502 Charisma 18

Luck 18

It was a negligible amount, but his magic power and intuition had increased. He had failed the synthesis, but it wasn’t a complete failure. He felt a second wind reinvigorating him once again. He chugged down a few bottles of magic essence, then went to butt heads with synthesising the Alchemic Bomb (Dark) again. When he began setting up for his next attempt, Bertelgia spoke against it.

“It might be better to take a breather. It’s too much to repeatedly try making a 5th level item at your level.”

“You think so?”

“People often think Alchemy and Magic are separate things, but at its core, it is an undeniable branch of magic that transforms something through techniques and sheer force of will. Also, the magical fingerprint sitting on your body could be ruined by excessively overusing your magic power. You should at least know that you can’t use magic anymore if the magical fingerprint gets destroyed, right?”

Bertelgia’s warnings were not something to ignore. Sungchul immediately understood her sentiments and quietly asked a question.

“How many attempts a day would be safe?”

He asked regarding the maximum amount he could handle. Bertelgia took a moment, then answered in a soft voice.

“3 times. Anything more than that would be trouble.”

“Ok. I’ll keep that in mind.”

Sungchul tried synthesising two more times and failed at them. He became depleted of mana at the last moment each time, and failed pitifully at the last second as his concentration wavered. However, Sungchul was not downtrodden. He was only getting a feel for the process and his stats increased marginally with each failure.

‘Ok. With this feeling, I should be able to succeed in at least three

days' time.'

The alchemy students, who were not able to understand Sungchul's condition, used the freak newcomer that was consecutively creating explosions in the distance to fuel their alcohol binge.

“Ah! That idiot. He made such a ruckus about creating a 5th level alchemic item, and what's he doing now? Is he planning on blowing up the entire school?”

“That's what I'm sayin'. He's all show. Look at the way he's using that scale.”

At that moment, a single figure walked in their direction. The students who had been drinking or smoking weed froze at the sight of him.

“Whew. The stench of trash. Truly repulsive, isn't it?”

The identity of the man wearing a robe dyed in the crimson colour of the school of Pyromancy was Leonard Sanctum. He looked at the alchemy students like insects as he stepped over to them then smiled brightly as he saw Sungchul standing beside his alchemical cauldron emitting black smoke.

“Ah ha!”

His figure vanished instantly and appeared before Sungchul.

“Hey, Mr. Unwelcomed-Guest-of-School-of-Cosmomancy. How are you doing?”

He pulled his face closer to the alchemic cauldron then formed an expression of shock as he looked at the failed synthesis product.

“Oh, my. Are you perhaps in charge of presenting a product for the school of Alchemy?”

“It’s as you can see.”

“It looks as if you’ve failed, though.”

“....”

When Sungchul shut his mouth, Leonard let out a sharp laugh through his nose then walked past him.

“There isn’t much time left, so try your best. You’ll be processed for expulsion otherwise.”

Sungchul surmised that Leonard was behind the sudden decision to disband the school of Alchemy.

‘Mages have always been like this. They like their cloaks and daggers.’

However, it didn't make much difference to Sungchul regardless of what Leonard chose to do. Sungchul was confident that he could synthesize a 5th level alchemic item at this juncture. That result came to him a day after his expected time. What Sungchul had tried wasn't the Alchemic Bomb (Dark) nor Buoyant Crystal, but Elfir's Medicine.

The process of making Elfir's Medicine was similar enough to the method of a favorite recipe of his that it was almost indistinguishable. He had to decoct precious medicinal ingredients to milk their juices, then mix it with even rarer medicinal ingredients to create a medicinal soup. He used a large spoon to mix several alchemic ingredients containing magical properties with the medicinal soup, which is where it differed from his cooking recipe, but he had already experienced the trial and error for a majority of this process.

He approached it with the strategy of replenishing his missing mana with magical essence and coping with the mental focus as it came, and it happened on his second attempt at synthesis. He finally managed to see the spectacle of blinding brilliance flooding out of his alchemic cauldron.

[Synthesis Success!]

“Wow!”

Bertelgia passionately shook her body. It must have formed a

habit. Sungchul didn't appreciate her making a ruckus but happily accepted her gesture just this one time. He could feel the long forgotten feeling of accomplishment wet his thirsty heart as he filled the 5th level alchemic item of his creation into a glass bottle. He headed towards Basil Philrus afterwards.

“This is the promised 5th level alchemic item.”

The judging proceeded efficiently. Professor Robert Danton, from the school of Cryomancy, and Fregius, from the school of Pyromancy, were expected to attend the judging but Fregius could not be reached so his second-in-line Professor Maloouf attended in his stead.

There was a face Sungchul recognised sitting beside Armin Maloouf. Leonard Sanctum. He made a gesture to show that he recognised Sungchul as he entered the meeting room of the Emergency Management committee with Basil Philrus.

“We'll begin the judgment.”

The professors in charge of judging each utilized a different method to examine the item created by Sungchul. The examination methods were used to determine the alchemic item's type and effects, along with the authenticity of the item. The proceeding didn't take long.

“This is a 5th level alchemic item.”

Robert Danton made his acknowledgement first, followed by Armin with the same opinion. Leonard's face began to become twisted as it took an ugly shape.

“This can't be. How could this be...?!”

Sungchul lightly tossed the remainder of Elfir's Medicine towards him and firmly made a unique suggestion.

“Try it yourself then.”

Leonard did as Sungchul asked. The result was evident. Sungchul had created the real thing.

“This... can't be!”

As his superiors finished making their judgements and were prepared to announce the result, Leonard shouted with sheer arrogance in the face of the situation at hand.

“Fucking cocky bastard. If it weren't for Fregius, I would've already dealt with such a fucker.”

Armin's attitude wasn't much different, but he didn't express it as such. The results was announced in the midst of Leonard's disruptive muttering.

“The decision of disbandment is null as we accept that the assigned task has been completed satisfactorily by the school of Alchemy. However, the duration of the annulment is a year; the school of Alchemy will have to provide another reason to continue their existence within the Academy within a year from now.”

It was a triumphant moment. Basil and his students, who had been holding their breaths with their hands clenched while eavesdropping on every movement within the meeting room, let out a cheer together. Sungchul returned as roaring cheers slowly filled the hallway. In that moment, Leonard suddenly jumped up from his seat.

“You!”

Leonard had lost all pretense of decorum.

“You, piece of shit! Sungchul! Come over here! I can’t just let you go.”

Sungchul quietly turned and looked directly at Leonard.

“?!”

Leonard felt a suffocating terror engulf him in that instant, but brushed it off as a moment of insanity and continued to shout.

“It’s a duel! Let’s settle this with a Gauntlet! You can’t refuse if you’re a man, right?”

Robert stood from his seat with an unpleasant expression on his face as Armin also stood from his seat. In that moment, the shut door of the Emergency Management Committee's meeting room flew open and the desperate face of a student wearing the robe of the school of Pyromancy appeared.

"I-it's a disaster!"

Robert paused and looked over at the student.

"What is it?"

The Pyromancy student replied tearfully at the question.

"P-professor Fregius... has been murdered!"

That single sentence was enough to drive everyone listening into a shock. The most traumatized by the news was the quick-tempered Leonard Sanctum. Fregius was the one whose protection allowed him to return to school and the one with authority to fight back against the headmaster of Cryomancy.

He had lost both his protector and his backer in a single moment.

Robert's chilling gaze fell onto Leonard.

"You, get out of my face. You fucking garbage."

Leonard's face burned bright enough to be visibly seen, but he couldn't say anything in return as he left the meeting room with his head down as though he was escaping. The landscape of power within Airfruit had suddenly changed. Sungchul, who had been in the centre of the whole spectacle, looked out the window with his mouth shut.

'I can feel a storm brewing.'

The premonition was predictably accurate. When Sungchul returned to the House of Recollections, a familiar rodent leapt in his direction.

"Kyu Kyu!"

It was the Sky Squirrel, but its condition was strange. The creature with no letter or message attached to it had its front paw stained red with blood. Sungchul could smell it. It wasn't from the Sky Squirrel. It was the scent of human blood.

Chapter 45 – Gathering Storms (1)

It was within a musty darkness. A young man in his early-twenties was vacantly staring at an incapacitated corpse with its hands tied around the chair. He was looking down on at the remains which were in a state where it was more accurate to call it a pile of meat marinated in blood rather than a human corpse. The youth continued looking at the corpse with curious eyes before he grabbed one of the torture devices and pushed it deep into the body of the corpse. The dead don't move. The youth looked behind him and asked with an innocent voice.

“Mom, why did he die?”

The youth's question rang out in the darkness as two silhouettes appeared from the shadows. One male and one female. They both wore black robes with a feline mask.

“This person's heart contains a covenant.”

The female's voice echoed in the dark.

“A covenant?”

When the youth asked, the woman approached the corpse tethered to the chair and pulled the prosthetic arm attached to his right side, then pointed its finger toward the heart region that was currently exposed.

“The moment an oath taken under the Divine Mediator’s name is broken; your life is forfeited. He must have broken his oath the moment he decided to reveal the name you sought. That was why the heart exploded.”

Listening to the woman’s explanation, the youth looked deflated and dropped the small knife in his hand.

“Ah, so unlucky. It was my first interrogation! To meet such an idiot.”

A man appeared behind him. He was a tall youth wearing the same black robe and feline mask as the rest. He slapped the discouraged youth on his back and spoke mischievously.

“What a shame of an interrogation! Why does everything you do turn out like this? You can’t even do one interrogation right. I’d have made this guy spit out the name of the fucker we wanted in a minute!”

“Brother, don’t be too harsh. This is our Pict’s humble beginnings.”

Black fog smoldered behind the teen. The fog transformed into a young woman with a sensual body shape. Black hair and blood red eyes. She wore a playful smile as she wore the feline mask.

“All hear me.”

The man who appeared first spoke with a serious voice. He accepted the gaze of the four before him and extended his left arm in a disciplined gesture. There was a tattoo of lightning piercing a skull etched onto the back of his hand. It might appear to be normal or even tacky, but those that knew its meaning would never underestimate it. It was because the tattoo represented one of the four families that controlled the assassin's guild, Almeria Family. It wasn't the most powerful among the four families, but it was known to be the most sinister. They always moved as a single unit on missions.

“This time, we face off against the Enemy of the World. He is a monster among monsters whose strength exceeds the 600 mark. One mistake can cost us our lives. Don't lower your guard. Always step carefully. As a father, I don't wish to lose any of my family members.”

The current patriarch of the Almeria family, D'vici Almeria finished his brief speech then disappeared with his wife into the darkness on the far side. The oldest son and daughter, Kaz Almeria and Mayra Almeria, quietly followed after their parents.

The only one remaining was their youngest, Pict Almeria. His face was still twisted as though his anger from the previous incident hadn't been resolved. He picked up the prosthetic arm that had been left on the ground, opened the dead man's jaw, then tried to shove the entire prosthetic inside. The corpse, tied to the chair, thrashed about wildly.

“This fucker...! All because of this shit!

The teen left the scene; leaving a mangled corpse behind. A man sought out the blood-soaked room after a considerable amount of time had passed.

“.....”

Sungchul steadily looked at the pitifully disfigured corpse.

‘Christian.’

His face could not be recognised due to the grotesque methods of the interrogation, but the prosthetic embedded into his jaw revealed his identity.

“Ew... What the... I can’t look at this...”

Bertelgia dug deeper into the breast pocket. Sungchul looked around at his surroundings. They didn’t leave behind a single clue besides the horrendous torture tools and blood that is. This wasn’t done by just anybody. Sungchul felt that in his guts, but why? He fell into deep contemplation briefly beside Christian’s corpse. In the end, he discovered something shiny within the blood-soaked torture devices. A gold coin reflecting a golden light. The unmarked coin.

‘Did they use this to track him...?’

He wasn’t fully aware of the ongoing of the world of Mercantilism, but he had heard stories. There was a rumour which

he found hard to believe that a skilled merchant could use a single coin to uncover its entire context. He had brushed it off with a laugh before, but this was the only clue he had at this point.

‘Is this an act by someone who’s targeting me?’

There was no other way to interpret this. It was difficult to imagine that anyone would pour so many resources to chase down a single worthless slave hunter. Sungchul was also still in the superior position. His unknown enemies must not have been able to uncover anything about him due to the covenant’s power.

Sungchul pulled out the prosthetic from Christian’s mouth, attached it to his missing limb, then looked at his figure for a bit. He wasn’t a bad friend. There were stories Sungchul wanted to hear from him. How he became a slave hunter. How he had spent his school life. There was never a time to ask him about his life, and now he would never know.

Buzz! Buzz!

Flies began to gather at the scent of rotting flesh. Sungchul poured oil over the corpse and lit it on fire. Turning his back on the roaring fire, Sungchul blended into the dizzying lights of the Slave Street once again. He could hear a panicked scream regarding a fire.

“....”

His mouth was firmly shut, but his eyes radiated a wrathful glare that was sharp enough to cut through the moonlight in the night.

When Sungchul returned to the House of Recollections, he could see Sarasa waiting at the entrance. She looked different in some way. The usual haughty expression on her face was nowhere to be seen, instead, she looked more like a problem child who was caught stirring trouble. The reason was soon revealed to him.

“Hiiiiing....”

It was because he could hear a familiar cry behind Sarasa’s back.

“Ah... it was out and about.”

Sarasa avoided Sungchul’s gaze and handed him the Sky Squirrel. When her cold grip released the Sky Squirrel, it broke free and hopped up onto Sungchul’s shoulder.

“Kyu Kyu!”

The Sky Squirrel enjoyed the touch of people, but it didn’t seem to enjoy Sarasa’s cold hands. She looked at it with a bitter expression and spoke harshly.

“Our dorm bans pets and livestock.”

“...It’s just for a little while.”

Sungchul spoke simply before brushing past her and headed to his room. Sarasa stared at his back and followed him closely.

“I said it was forbidden. I’m the dorm’s owner.”

“I can’t help it as the owner of the Squirrel had died. I just need a single day.”

Sarasa was always quite forceful, but hearing that the owner had died, she moved back a step.

“I-is that right?”

Sungchul nodded. He left Sarasa behind and headed towards his own room once again. The messy interior, as it was when he first arrived, greeted him. He placed the Sky Squirrel on top of the bed before sitting down himself to organise his thoughts.

‘If it is an assassin that’s targeting me, I don’t have much time.’

It could have been a coincidence, but this person had arrived within Golden City at least. The existence of the gold coin at the scene bothered him the most.

Sungchul had visited the tool shop in front of the school before

he had returned to the dorm. The store owner seemed to live away from the store. There was no sign of life within, and no sign of forced entry. It was also quite late so no one was around to ask for any explanation. To know the complete story, he would have to wait until the sun was up.

‘With Christian dead, there really isn’t anywhere I can reliably get information from.’

Sarasa was waiting for him in front of the door. She looked as though something was on her mind.

“What’s up?”

Sungchul asked with no inflection in his voice. Sarasa avoided his gaze and hesitated, but then her expression changed and she looked back into his eyes.

“About that incident before, I don’t have any ill will towards it. I think it was immature of me to lash out.”

“It’s not something to apologize for.”

Sunghul closed the door. Or when he tried to close it, Sarasa’s pale hand forced itself through.

“W-wait!”

He opened the door again.

“....”

Sungchul’s frosty gaze landed on Sarasa’s face.

“You don’t have to look at me like that. I just wanted to say... you’ve been here for a while now, so as students sharing the dorm, we should be conversing every now and then. Anyways!”

Her eyes looked through Sungchul and at the Sky Squirrel curled up on his bed. For whatever reason, it seemed that she took a liking to it. Sungchul noticed the gaze and recalled a long buried image of the past.

‘That kid also particularly liked animals.’

The forgotten reverie was cut short by Sarasa’s voice.

“Anyways, you. It looks like you were chasing down the quests within the House of Recollections. You’re welcome to ask me anything you don’t know. It looks like I made a mistake today, so I’ll be especially nice.”

“What can you teach me?”

“A strategy against the Devil of the Immovable Door.”

Sarasa looked quite confident.

“Are you talking about the swindling devil? I already beat him.”

“Oh yea? How about the Underground Well’s Skull Soldier quest?”

“Beat that one too.”

“Oh yea..?!”

She listed several more quests, but the results were the same.

“How could this be... you’re lying, right?”

She looked incredulously at Sungchul. Sungchul, who saw her hesitation, thought up one question.

“Do you know about the magic tool shop outside of the campus?”

“Ah, Carbuncle? Yea. Of course, I know.”

“About the owner too?”

Sarasa opened her eyes brightly and nodded.

“You’re talking about that plump man with a booming voice, right? Yea, I know him. I knew him since I was an undergraduate.”

A strange light flashed across Sungchul’s eyes. He continued to ask her more questions.

“Do you know where he lives?”

“I know, but why are you asking?”

“I have some items to deliver to him. It’d be nice if you could tell me his location if you know it.”

As he said that, Sungchul let out a whistle to call the Sky Squirrel.

“Kyu Kyu!”

Sarasa’s eyes became fixed on the Sky Squirrel. It trembled as though it feared Sarasa’s interest, but due to Sungchul’s grip, it ended up in Sarasa’s grasp.

“I’ll leave him to you since I have something to deliver to him.”

“Ah... ok.”

She gathered her hands to hold the Sky Squirrel. It shrieked, but

as Sungchul handed it a peanut, it calmed. Sungchul handed her a small paper pouch of peanuts and answered her question that was clearly on her mind.

“The fastest way to get close to an animal is through its belly.”

“I-I see!”

She handed over the information regarding the magic tool shop owner with no resistance.

Sungchul headed out into the darkness towards the shop owner's house. The interior of the home was pitch black. Sungchul hid his presence as his Eye of Truth surveyed the surroundings for potential dangers while he entered the house.

“ ... ”

It wasn't too late. The murderer's reach hadn't extended here just yet. The owner had simply fallen asleep.

Sungchul shook the man awake. The shop owner who had been muttering in his sleep rubbed his eyes away and met the unwelcome guest.

“W-What is wrong, sir?”

Sungchul pushed the bloody gold coin towards the frightened

shop owner.

“Do you remember this?”

The owner finally realised that the unwelcome guest's identity was the whale from before. Various thoughts crawled around his head, but he couldn't imagine something as shocking as what was revealed by the customer.

“I am Sungchul, the ‘one who demolishes’. People seemed to have taken to calling me the Enemy of the World.”

He pulled out Fal Garaz, the weapon fabled to have been given to the Dwarves by their god as if to prove his identity. Once the shop owner saw the item of legend, he was overwhelmed with shock as though his breath tried to escape back into his lungs.

“Kuh... uh... uh....”

Sungchul glared at him and spoke with a soft but forceful voice.

“Take your belongings and leave Golden City. Head to the province of the Human Empire and seek an Imperial Audience with the Emperor.”

“Uh.... Uhh....”

He pulled out a sword made of ivory from his Soul Storage and

handed it to the shop owner who was still having trouble forming a single sentence.

“Show this to the Imperial Court, and the Emperor will grant you an audience. However, never forget that if you reveal this truth to anyone else...”

Sungchul reached behind the shop owner towards the display cupboard. The decoration made of copper crumpled in his grip and parts of it squeezed out of between his fingers like butter.

“Hiii!!!”

“If you mistakenly think that you can hide from me, you’re welcome to try it. You’re welcome to gamble your life on that bet.”

Sungchul placed the bloody gold coin in front of the man and turned around.

“Leave immediately.”

“Y-Yes, sir!”

The man stumbled out of his bed and pulled on some clothes in a hurry to begin packing. He left with not a moment to spare in the cold night air towards a distant location.

“....”

Sungchul watched the horse-drawn cart disappear before turning around.

“Quite unexpected of you?”

Bertelgia spoke from his pocket.

“What is?”

When Sungchul asked, Bertelgia popped out of his pocket and landed on his shoulder like the Sky Squirrel had.

“I thought you’d kill the man. That’s what I expected, anyways.”

“I don’t arbitrarily kill innocent men.”

“That’s what I didn’t expect. I thought you were someone ruthless. Like the Seven Heroes.”

“... I am different from them.”

Sungchul spoke as though he was making a promise to himself, then looked off towards the sky. The light had already begun to peek out from the Eastern horizon.

‘I bought myself a bit of time, but there still isn’t much left. It’s

time to change my plans and rush getting the secrets of Cosmomancy, then leave this place.'

His gaze fell on the domed structure sitting high on top of the mountain range.

Chapter 46 – Gathering Storms (2)

The death of Fregius, the headmaster of the school of Pyromancy, came as a great shock to Airfruit Magical Academy. Early in the morning, Sungchul could see a truly rare sight. Hundreds of students were gathered on the campus. It was something that hadn't occurred since the vital flow of new students had been cut from the school. They were looking at the large poster on the plaza message board. The news of the Pyromancy Headmaster's passing was written within.

“My God... for Professor Fregius to have died.”

“One of the pillars that supported this school has collapsed.”

“Where is Airfruit headed for now?”

Sungchul met a familiar face as he walked while listening to the conversations among the crowd.

“Ey! Genius Alchemist!”

It was Basil Philrus who looked closer to ‘that older kid’ you knew around the neighbourhood rather than a professor. Sungchul acknowledged his wave with an indifferent expression. Basil, looking a bit embarrassed, began to scratch his head.

“Ah, well. Isn't my face feelin' quite heated.”

“What’s wrong?”

Basil had already seen rock bottom and couldn’t find a reason for Sungchul to observe formality.

“Greetings. More importantly, have you seen the poster?”

Basil, as though he acknowledged his incompetence, didn’t mention Sungchul’s attitude towards him. Sungchul looked at Basil’s smirking face and asked a question.

“Are you referring to Professor Fregius’s death?”

“Yes! Of course. However, that’s not all. There’s another story veiled beneath!”

“Another story?”

This time, Sungchul took an interest. Christian’s death had been such a major incident for him, but it wasn’t as though the passing of the one labeled as the leader of the Followers of Calamity could be put aside. When Sungchul’s frosty exterior seemed to have melted slightly, Philrus became excited and kept on blabbering.

“Ah yes. You’ll be surprised when I tell you. Come this way.”

He brought Sungchul to an isolated spot, then looked around once before speaking with a soft voice.

“I overheard this from the meeting between professors. They say that Professor Fregius was murdered in the same method as our former principal, Professor The Grand Magnus, three years ago. Presumably, it was the same person.”

“What was the method?”

Philrus took a moment to gather his thoughts before making his reply.

“One-half of the corpse was torn asunder as though it was struck by a great force. They say it’s a horrid scene that they couldn’t sit through and it was as though someone had taken a Meteor directly to the face.”

“Meteor?”

Meteor was a popular spell within the school of Cosmomancy. It was a powerful spell that summoned a comet from the sky to critically strike an enemy on the ground.

“That’s what they say, but as you know, Meteor isn’t something that can be used indoors. If they had used it indoors, they would have blown away not only the professor but also the building with it.”

“He died indoors? Professor Fregius, I mean?”

Basil nodded. Sungchul had more practical experience with this situation than anyone else, but he had never encountered such a spell.

‘I can’t discount that it could be some derivation of a summoning spell.’

This was obvious as it was to the point that a magical academy with a wide variety of magic couldn’t make head or tail of this magic.

“Anyways, who could the criminal be? To kill The Grand Magnus and now the headmaster-to-be Fregius, he can’t be a run-of-the-mill mage.”

“The criminal is a mage?”

“That’s right. We found remnants of magic. That’s why they’re so frantic. What kind of mage could have done such a thing? It had to have been a powerful mage that could overcome those peerless mages. People are suspecting that the head of the school of Cryomancy, Robert Danton, is the murderer, but as I see it, this kind of deed isn’t something Cryomancy can do.”

At that moment, soldiers wearing shining silver armour were marching onto the campus. Countless students took the hint and began scattering away; the area naturally fell under the soldier’s jurisdiction. Basil frowned at the sudden commotion.

“Phew, they’re back. Those dogs from the Order of Purification.”

Sungchul’s gaze turned towards the soldiers as well. He also glimpsed at the man that was being escorted by the soldiers. With his white judge’s garb and a crow mask, he looked closer to a divine entity than a man.

‘Is that the Inquisitor of Heresy?’

Inquisitor of Heresy was an incredibly religious crusader of faith that worked as a clergyman within one of the two orders that followed the God of Order; the God of Order being one of the five main gods of the Other World. However, it wasn’t uncommon that the blind faith of these people gave off a bad vibe. Sungchul had witnessed a certain innocent northernmost frontier village located close to the Demon Realm disappear.

He had also killed three of these inquisitors. They weren’t particularly powerful foes. He only felt that they had the resilience of a cockroach.

‘I want to avoid confrontation, if possible.’

Basil piped up as Sungchul was organising his thoughts.

“That inquisitor. There are rumours that he is the half-brother of our former principal, The Grand Magnus.”

“Half-brother?”

“That’s right. The Magnus name is a mage family known for their deep history, but the Inquisitor, who was the child of the legal wife, was sent to the Order due to his lack of talent. The Grand Magnus on the other hand, as the son of a mistress, was so talented that he managed to earn the Grand title to his name. Well, as the rumours say that is.”

Basil continued to tell more stories, but they were all irrelevant gossip. Sungchul ended the conversation appropriately, then turned to head towards the school of Cosmomancy. It was at this moment that a crowd of mages was heading in his direction. It was a group of students wearing uniforms dyed in blue accompanied by a middle-aged magician. He was acquainted with the middle-aged magician.

Stocky jaw with a sharp nose. A face with indifferent blue eyes. It was the headmaster of the school of Cryomancy, Robert Danton. Sungchul recalled the scene of him tossing out Leonard Sanctum in the most humiliating manner after the news of the Headmaster of Pyromancy’s death. That Robert Danton was looking at Sungchul right in the eyes. Without notice, he stopped before Sungchul.

“Can we speak briefly?”

“If it’s only very brief.”

Robert didn’t react to Sungchul’s brash reply, but the students behind him were livid.

“No manners. Who do you think this person is that you can speak to him with your back so stiff?”

“Just an alchemist. Know your place!”

Robert held up his hand to command his underlings to cease the racket, then looked at Sungchul to speak again.

“Just a moment is fine, so come by my room.”

“I can’t spare a lot of time.”

The ends of Robert’s lips twitched. He turned and headed to his room first, then Sungchul followed behind while receiving nasty looks from his students.

“Oh, my. Why did he come already? I... I couldn’t make my request yet!”

Basil’s only request was a small wish to keep his spot as the professor of the school of Alchemy.

“I heard the rumours. They say you’re a preselected among the summoned.”

Robert began speaking as soon as he took his seat. Sungchul

simply nodded.

“I am also from a preselected group. It’s been 15 years since I arrived here.”

He spoke as though it was a distant past, but to Sungchul, he was still green. Sungchul had been summoned approximately 25 years back. Though, his appearance and age looked years apart.

“So, let’s cut to the chase as you’ve said that you haven’t much time. I’ll speak plainly.”

Robert rose from his seat, closed all of the room’s curtains, then took a brief glance around before standing behind Sungchul in the end.

“If I may ask, who is your backer? It doesn’t matter if you can’t say, but it’ll help me understand you better to overcome any misunderstandings so think carefully and speak.”

He directly asked for Sungchul’s background. Sungchul could only think that he was an honest person before several candidates for names popped in his head. He filtered the names based on their strength and the difficulty for Robert to get in contact. Soon a faction appeared in his mind, and he spoke its name firmly.

“The Ancient Kingdom.”

“The Ancient Kingdom...?!”

Robert wet his lips.

“Isn’t the Ancient Kingdom a place that forbids magic? Why would a group that stands against magic send you here?”

“You should be well aware that they use plenty of it behind the scenes, right?”

Robert broke into laughter after hearing this and didn’t ask any further, but it wasn’t clear whether he believed in Sungchul’s words. Tension flowed between the two of them as Robert opened his mouth once again.

“I saw your skill first hand, although strictly speaking, it is the strength of the backers behind you. On that line of thought, why not lend your strength to me?”

“What do you mean?”

Sungchul threw out his question on his feet.

“Join my side. After Fregius’ death, there is no one but me to lead the school. It is but a shell of an institution, but we can try to lead it into a better direction. I need a lot of support for that purpose.”

Sungchul circled the room as Robert returned to his seat and spoke again.

“Is that your actual name?”

Sungchul nodded.

“I believed it as a fake name. I even checked it when you created that 5th level alchemic item. I thought, ‘Ah, this friend wants to attract the school’s attention with such a name’.”

He misinterpreted the situation to match his own expectations. Sungchul continued to listen to what Robert hoped to ideally achieve. He managed to determine a single line of thought within Robert’s dull story. Robert didn’t believe that Sungchul produced Elfir’s Medicine, despite the truth of the matter. It could have been that the man wasn’t familiar with alchemy or that there was no one to advise him otherwise. Whichever case it was, it was to Sungchul’s benefit. It was due to this misunderstanding that Robert was about to begin negotiations with the most dangerous man that stood with no friends nor allies.

“Anyways, I don’t know who your friends are that stand behind you, but I can tell that they are willing to devote their heart and soul for you. I know this because I was also a preselected. I guess one could call it the difference in temperament felt between preselecteds. I know this better than most.”

Robert continued to speak vaguely until finally, he said what was on his mind.

“I need gold coins. A significant amount of gold coins. It is almost

assured that I will be the principal, but there are many areas that will require large funds to expedite the process.”

“What can you do for me?”

Sungchul asked sharply.

“If you become my strength, I’ll give you an important position within Airfruit. Naturally, a position that your backer will be pleased with. People might say that Airfruit is finished, but its name still holds value, so it isn’t a bad trade.”

Regarding this, Sungchul stared unflinchingly at Robert as he spoke.

“I want to hear more details.”

“I will give you a position as a professor if you want. As you know, the current professor in charge of the school of Alchemy, Basil Philrus is quite incompetent. He’s someone that has to be kicked out.”

“Isn’t it too early? I’m a foreigner that hasn’t even been here for a year.”

“I didn’t mean to give it to you immediately. Several preparations need to be made first, but once I’m headmaster, I can prepare you to be on Airfruit Academy’s greatest elite course to set you on the path to valedictorian. How about it?”

“....”

Sungchul didn't reply. Robert wasn't pleased with Sungchul's response, but exerting more self-control, he spoke softly.

“Is it not enough?”

“I only want the secrets of Cosmomancy. If you can notify Altugius to allow him to hand over the secrets of Cosmomancy, I'll ask my backers.”

“Altugius...”

Robert began to frown. It looked as though something was on his mind. After significant time had passed, A thin smile formed on his lips, and he nodded.

“I'll give it a go, but it won't be easy.”

“What does that mean?”

“Altugius is quite stubborn. I'll put in a word, but he isn't someone who is liable to listen to others. He wouldn't listen to that vicious Fregius, so what are the chances he'll listen to me?”

“Then it complicates things.”

“But, he also has a weakness. It is time. Once that girl he treasures so much begins to rot, I’m sure his ears will open. Will you wait for me until then?”

Sungchul nodded for now. He knew nothing would change whether he agreed or not at this point.

Robert, who became much happier, looked at Sungchul attentively. The man who had been observing Sungchul’s face with narrowed eyes like a viper suddenly opened his mouth.

“Now that I think about it, you must be trying to gather some strength if you desire the secrets of Cosmomancy.”

“Isn’t strength everything in the Other World?”

Robert rolled his eyes and spoke as though he had been waiting for that exact reply.

“I can’t attest to the quality of the secret as I’ve never seen it myself, but I feel as though it’s greatly exaggerated. It also seems as though there might have been exaggerations mixed in with the rumor that Altugius managed to kill the vice-captain of the Assassin’s Guild. Mayhaps, the vice-captain wasn’t in peak form.”

Robert continued to speak empty words until he slipped in his true intentions.

“Why not put aside Cosmomancy for the secrets of Cryomancy?”

Sungchul sharply shook his head, and Robert’s face twisted ever so slightly. Sungchul, seeing this reaction, had an immediate thought.

‘Should I test him?’

During the time he fought against the Followers of Calamity, he learned more than just combat techniques. He experienced commonalities in mental states and habits of mages and learned how to agitate, anger, or calm them.

“I was ordered to learn the secret of Cosmomancy or learn something equivalent.”

The trap was set.

“Is it not possible for Cryomancy to be that substitute?”

“Cryomancy or Pyromancy aren’t suitable as substitutes.”

“Why do you believe so?”

“It is too common.”

These words were to agitate Robert’s pride. Magicians tended to

be crafty but were also known to be extremely prideful. As expected, Robert's eyes changed. It fell into the same patterns Sungchul had experienced countless times before.

Robert took a deep breath before fixing his eyes onto Sungchul, then spoke.

“If you seek a path that leads to true enlightenment, I can help guide you a bit. Not too deep, but just a little. Just enough for you and your backers to be satisfied with.”

“What are you speaking of?”

When Sungchul asked, Robert made a wicked smile.

“To witness extinction very briefly. Just a bit of it.”

Bad vibes always proved to be accurate. Sungchul looked at Robert in a different light.

‘Is this bastard also a Follower of Calamity?’

The entire school was rotten. He briefly thought of the possibility that most of the core members of the school were Followers of Calamity, but his expression remained unchanged. He made a leisurely smile instead and held a hand out towards Robert.

“That is exactly the purpose I came to Airfruit for.”

As he spoke, he opened his Soul Storage and pulled out a crate.

‘Oh... to already have a Soul Storage. This guy is an unexpectedly powerful figure.’

Robert’s heart skipped a beat as he waited for the crate to open. Sungchul opened the crate with crude movements. Blinding golden light flooded out of the crate and obstructed Robert’s vision. Sungchul felt a wide smile form on Robert’s lips as he grabbed one of the golden coins.

The golden coin without a mark.

The unmarked golden coins.

Sungchul handed Robert one of these golden coins and spoke to Robert in a firm voice.

“Never speak that you got these coins from me. Unless you wish the entirety of the Ancient Kingdom as your enemy.”

“I swear upon my name.”

Robert replied with a smile from ear to ear.

The fish had bit down on the bait.

Chapter 47 – Gathering Storms (3)

When he returned to the Cosmomancy building, the atmosphere within the observatory had changed for several reasons.

“You’ve finally come.”

Altugius walked over and called out in his gruff voice as Sungchul entered the building. Sungchul nodded then looked over to the side. Leonard’s hammock had been folded away. Instead, he sat on the floor upright looking studious with a book in his hand. He paused in his studies, moving the book slightly he gave Sungchul a heinous glare. Sungchul ignored his gaze and continued to move towards Altugius.

“Did you call for me?”

Altugius nodded. Sungchul felt that the man looked 10 years older than he was in that moment. It wasn’t due to his physical health, but rather he looked extremely exhausted.

“I have put you at a distance due to personal reasons, but I have decided to teach you in earnest from this point on.”

Altugius handed Sungchul a single necklace. It was a medallion depicting the form of a planet in the sun’s orbit with a ray of light striking its center.

“This is the insignia of the school of Cosmomancy. Wear it on

your neck.”

Sungchul did as he was told.

“It is actually quite an impressive medallion, but it doesn’t seem to fit with your attire.”

It looked as though Sungchul’s fashion resembling a laborer didn’t quite suit Altugius.

“First, I feel as though you should get a fitted uniform. It has been bothering me for quite a while, to be honest.”

There was no way for Sungchul to know, but Altugius was referred to as the Tiger Professor as he strictly enforced student morality. Leonard who had been listening in on their conversation let out a laugh. Altugius turned his head and shot him a look.

“Anyways, we have an unwelcome guest.”

Altugius pointed a finger towards Leonard’s face.

“What is [some strange creature](#) that I had never taken in as a disciple doing here?”

You might think this is a bit contradictory since he was his former disciple, but Altugius was being mean here treating Leonard harshly by saying he’s never taken him as a disciple.

The chilling sarcasm echoed loudly throughout the observatory. Leonard's expression immediately changed. He had believed that Altugius had accepted him as Altugius had never spoken about his presence here, but it now appeared that the professor had been patiently enduring his presence for the opportunity to chase him out when Sungchul arrived.

'I should have killed that fucker...'

His insides were boiling with anger, but it was already too late. He got on his knees and put on a strained expression in hopes of inverting his situation.

"I'm sorry, master! I... I couldn't be more sorrier. It was all due to Fregius' schemes..."

"I don't need anything from you. Leave immediately."

Altugius was ruthless. As he held out his hand, a brilliant staff with 5 different gems embedded within it appeared from his Soul Storage.

"Or are you prepared to have a Gauntlet with me?"

Regardless of Leonard's status within the school as an individual with great strength, he would not be able to contend against Altugius who left behind a legend. He paled then turned around to escape while uttering unintelligible babble, screaming as he retreated from the building. Altugius let out a refreshing laugh

after watching this scene.

“Don’t come back! You’re expelled!”

‘This old man. Was this his original personality?’

It was unexpected. The old man who always had his back turned towards him had such a magnanimous personality.

“That kid is a Follower of Calamity. You should also know who they are, right?”

Sungchul nodded.

“Damnable fools. True degenerates. I wanted to kill him, but seeing that he was my disciple, it would leave a bad taste in my mouth.”

Altugius put a pipe in his mouth before inhaling deeply as he looked towards the ceiling of the observatory. There was nothing of interest to see on the domed ceiling that was plastered in white.

“How was the Summoning Palace?”

Altugius pulled out his pipe to suddenly ask his question.

“It’s not a place for leisure.”

Sungchul replied.

“That seems right. It is a hellish place. However, it is a necessary evil. People from your world think too differently from ours. When too many people with different ideas arrive, the world will inevitably change.”

It was an interesting perspective. Sungchul had always believed that the Summoning Palace was a special rite of passage designed to filter out the greatest from the rest, to find individuals who could become the saviors of the Other World. Those who were summoned would generally receive better treatment anywhere they went.

Altugius breathed out a smoke-infused sigh as he took his eyes off the ceiling.

“However, this place has also turned into hell. It doesn’t matter what the others think.”

“Are you referring to the Followers of Calamity?”

“Maybe. Maybe not. They aren’t the important part, but the calamity that they worship is. The calamity is eating away at us bit by bit until we all become insane. It is enough to bewitch even the most noble of us.”

Altugius tightly shut both his eyes and fell into deep thought.

Soon after, he pulled out volume 2 from his soul storage.

“Take this for now.”

Sungchul opened the book as he received it, but it wasn't something he could understand as of now.

“It's the book relating to Meteor., the popular spell that is the core of the school of Cosmomancy. You'll need to exceed 210 intuition to learn it.”

“Isn't this progress too fast?”

“Might be, but this is a dangerous world. We never know what is going to happen next. First with the principal and now Fregius, I might also disappear at any time.

Altugius' voice trembled slightly. Sungchul saw concern and anxiety within his expression.

“It has been a while since I've seen a stubborn student like you. A rare sight to see. Whatever your purpose is or of whoever is behind you, it is best to give up on all of that meaningless stuff.”

Altugius, like Robert Danton, suspected Sungchul of being out of the ordinary with someone supporting him from the shadows. It simply exceeded common sense to witness such a rapid growth otherwise.

“That is why I’m gifting you with this. I won’t know when you’ll be able to make Meteor your own, but it also isn’t any of my business.”

Altugius finished speaking and returned to his old spot, then turned his back once again. He shot out an unexpected final sentence at Sungchul who was staring at his back.

“Now, get going since I gave you what you wanted.”

“What do you mean?”

“This is everything I can teach you. I’ll give you that book, so take it and go.”

It was an unexpected development. Sungchul felt slightly annoyed at the shameless old man’s change of heart.

‘This old man...’

He calmed his heart and spoke again.

“I can’t leave with just this.”

“Then?”

“What I want is the Secret. I don’t have any intention of leaving here before I receive the secret of Cosmomancy.”

Sungchul could sense magic emitting from Altugius at that moment. A beam of light shot towards Sungchul in that exact moment. A blinding flash. It was Glare. Glare’s light was aimed slightly off from Sungchul’s face. It was the same magic, but opposed to Sungchul’s magic power, it vastly outstripped his Glare’s brilliance and firepower. The beam of light pierced through a bookcase around the outer edge of the observatory and left a hole in the wall.

“....”

However, Sungchul did not even flinch. Altugius let out a fake cough and stood up from his seat.

“What a greedy friend. Can you not be satisfied with just the medallion and Meteor? I didn’t say it before, but with the medallion, other competitive schools of Cosmomancy will accept you as a student.”

“It can’t be anything other than the Secret.”

Sungchul didn’t budge at all. Altugius let out a groan. His eyes contained a deep sadness.

“Excessive greed can be your downfall. Like those of the Followers of Calamity.”

“It isn’t excessive. There is a reason that I must receive your Secret.”

“And that reason is?”

Altugius asked. Sungchul replied firmly without any hesitation in his voice.

“To stop the Calamity.”

Altugius’ eyes were dyed with surprise as he heard these words, but it lasted only briefly before he let out a chuckle.

“That’s impossible. Nothing can stop the Calamity.”

“The Seven Heroes have done it. Nothing is impossible.”

Sungchul spoke with finality. Altugius looked upon Sungchul with mixed emotions until he finally turned away.

“Leave. Before I become truly angry.”

“It isn’t my business whether you grow angry or not.”

Sungchul did not retreat a step. Instead, he stepped forward. Altugius sighed once more.

‘I don’t want to rough him up, but I suppose I have to suppress him with minimal damage.’

Sungchul immediately stopped moving and suddenly looked behind him. Altugius was confused by his abrupt actions, but the cause soon revealed itself.

‘A presence?!’

A presence that couldn’t be underestimated was felt beyond the door. Altugius felt a chill crawling through his body. The presence he felt was not much different than the figure that had made him famous in battle.

“Oh my, I was caught. Such good intuition.”

The door that had been firmly shut flew open. Beyond the open door, an uninvited guest wearing a black robe with a feline mask stood in wait. He looked at Sungchul and Altugius in turn before speaking in a bright voice.

“I would like to ask you; is this the school of Cosmomancy?”

Saying this the man took off his mask. A striking face with a long scar across his left eye was revealed. Sungchul could smell the scent of death from the young man.

‘Is he an assassin?’

Murderous intent openly dripped from his presence. This was a luxury that only a few with absolute confidence in their strength could enjoy. Generally, an assassin’s strength lies in their ambush, as it was natural for one’s weaknesses to be exposed in direct battles.

The mysterious youth continued to look alternately at Sungchul and Altugius.

“Hm. The one I seek doesn’t seem to be here. I’ll be taking a gander at both of your strengths, if I may.”

He pulled out a scroll and tore it before Altugius could put in a word otherwise. At that moment, his eyes filled with a magical formation and the stats of both men before him appeared.

‘Young man: Average. Old man: Extraordinary.’

An anecdote came to the young man’s mind. An anecdote whispered in hushed tones within the Assassin’s Guild.

“Ah, are you perhaps a man by the name of Altugius?”

“Ill-mannered child. How dare you come here and speak such ridiculous things?”

Altugius straightened his white beard and scolded in a thunderous voice. The youth showed a surprised expression, but that was it.

“Pffft, don’t torment the young so much. I just wanted to speak briefly.”

Altugius suddenly shot Glare towards him in that instant. The brilliant beam of light shot in that instant had been aimed just beside his temple. The young man, as with Sungchul, did not move. However, their reactions were different. The young man snarled in anger.

“Ey! You trying to start something here?”

He brushed his robes open revealing dozens of hidden weapons underneath. Altugius let out a laugh.

“Are you the Assassin Guild’s lackey? It is uncanny how you and that retard with red-hair act alike. If only you saw how that idiot died, you wouldn’t dare show yourself here.”

“I’m stronger than him, old man.”

The youth didn’t back down at all. The situation was quickly reaching its climax.

‘Not bad. I might be able to witness Altugius’ skill at this rate.’

Sungchul took a step back to witness this scene, but the fight Sungchul desired didn't come to fruition. A female voice from beyond the open door calmed the young man.

“[Orabuni](#) Kaz. What are you hoping to achieve by fooling around in a place like this?”

Orabuni-It is the most elevated (formal respectful) version of oppa. It is also used in place of ‘Young Master’.

Another figure with a black robe and feline mask entered the observatory.

“It looks like he isn't here anyways. Let's just go.”

“Why are you being like this, Myra? I just wanted to play around a bit before I left.”

The youth made a fuss, but his temper had been calmed. He looked at Altugius from the corner of his eye and turned around to leave.

“Sorry, old man. We'll settle the score another time.”

Altugius crossed his arms and laughed once again. The two figures that left the observatory descended the gentle mountain slope at a slow pace.

“Ah, I’m pissed.”

Kaz, the eldest son of the Almeira family, looked towards the sky as he muttered to himself. He knew it was a difficult assignment, but the trail was more than a bit bare. He had expected to get his hands on the legendary villain when he first discovered the slave hunter that had been using up the gold coins like they were water, but the covenant enchanted on the slave hunter’s body had ruined all of that. The man who couldn’t bear the torture uttered a single word: School of Cosmomancy. The man’s heart proceeded to combust into flames and was sacrificed to the God of Order as soon as he uttered the word.

“But why the school of Cosmomancy?”

Kaz looked back upon the domed building. The Enemy of the World and the school of Cosmomancy. There was no common ground to be found. He had ended up visiting the school in the end, but other than the famed old man, there was no one that could possibly fit the description.

“Anyways, Myra. How is it on our parent’s end? Did you find the other one using the unmarked gold coins?”

Myra shook her head at his question.

“Gone. Without saying a word to anyone.”

“.... Mmm. Could he have caught onto our scent?”

“Maybe. It could also be a coincidence. Either way, there is no reason to rush.”

Amidst the conversation, a lone figure caught Kaz’s eyes. It was a handsome man wearing a robe dyed in red. He had been sitting in the forest far from the school of cosmomancy by himself, screaming for some reason.

“What the hell? Who is that guy?”

“Who knows. Seems insane to me?”

Mayra brushed it off as though she wasn’t interested, but Kaz was different.

“I’m going to check him out for a bit.”

Kaz approached the screaming man like a child who had discovered a new interesting toy.

“BITCH! FUCK!!!!”

The identity of the man sitting in the forest screaming was none other than Leonard Sanctum.

Chapter 48 – Stinkbug (1)

He had killed countless of those weaker than him. He had been openly caught five times, but he had too many sins to name. Leonard, who had lived such a life, finally met his match.

“Kuu.....”

He was hung by his feet and exposed to unrelenting violence. Whips and clubs struck every inch of his body, and when he lost consciousness, a blast of cold water shook him awake. His opponent was a complete stranger.

Leonard who was beaten down to a pulp asked himself why he was in such a position. He couldn't think of an answer despite his best efforts to squeeze out an explanation. Other than a stroke of misfortune, that is.

“Now, shall we begin our story time?”

Kaz opened his mouth with a wicked smile. There were shiny torture tools in his hand in place of the whip, and Leonard who saw that began to thrash about wildly from his incapacitated position.

“When I first saw you, you had quite a handsome face. It pissed me off. So choose one: eyes, nose, mouth, or ear. To give up.”

A single blade lingered in front of Leonard's eyes. He began to

scream something unintelligible and thrashed about once again. Kaz who saw this ridiculous scene started laughing while holding his belly. He gripped Leonard's right ear, then sliced it off.

“Uwaaaaak!”

A pitiful scream rang out, but there was no one around to help Leonard. A sound barrier cast around the trees prevented his scream from leaking out any further. He was now facing the same final moments that he had forced on those weaker than him in the midst of this complete isolation. However, Kaz pulled out a bandage and stopped Leonard's bleeding as though he had something in mind.

“Want to live?”

Leonard endured the pain and forced his head to nod.

“If you tell me what I want to hear, I'll let you live.”

Kaz made a gesture towards Mayra who was sitting underneath the tree watching the scene silently.

“Mayra, lend me that thing.”

Mayra extended her hand without a word. When she did, a colourful insect about the size of a plum crawled out of her sleeve. It was a stink bug shaped like a trapezoid.

Kaz grabbed the bug carefully and tore away Leonard's shirt revealing his back full of bruises and cuts from the constant beating and whipping. Kaz placed the tail of the bug on his back. The bug's six legs flailed about as its sharp tail end began to bore itself into Leonard's back.

“Kwaaaaaak!”

Leonard thrashed about violently. The stinkbug was tearing through his flesh and laying its eggs. One. Two. Three. Kaz smiled with satisfaction as he saw ten eggs, then returned the bug to Mayra.

“Thanks, Mayra.”

Mayra returned the bug to her sleeve and spoke with a frosty voice.

“Father won't be pleased if he hears of this. You have to take responsibility.”

“I'll bear it. Don't worry. Anyways, don't you think father's methods are too old fashioned? Efficacy drops when we can only lay our hands on those involved.”

Kaz looked over at Leonard who was shaking like a twig and made a cruel smile.

“In this era of Calamity where we’re all destined to die anyways, we should use every tool available.”

Sungchul continued to confront Altugius. It was Altugius who broke first.

“Do what you want. I won’t take responsibility for whatever misfortune you meet by staying here!”

He let out a loud harrumph before sitting at his designated spot and sucking on his pipe. Sungchul was second to none when it came to stubbornness. He didn’t budge an inch as he acquired what he wanted.

“You don’t have to worry about me. Just let me know the Secret.”

Altugius continued to puff his pipe with a displeased expression when he suddenly pulled something out from his Soul Storage. It was a small box marked with the insignia of a comet. Orbs composed of gold, silver, bronze and all other kinds of alloys were revealed when Altugius opened the box with his wrinkled hands.

“Activate.”

When Altugius softly touched an orb, they floated around him on their own as if they were alive.

“These are the training tools used by Cosmomancers to learn their craft. People of the past called them the Stars of the Cosmos, but people of late have taken to calling them as pinballs. Anyways, they are used to gauge the proficiency of that Glare spell you’ve mastered.”

Altugius pulled out another item from his Soul Storage. It was a magic scroll. He lightly tossed over the container with the orbs and the scroll towards Sungchul.

“Perseverance is a type of talent. I have accepted that you have quite the talent in it. However, there are many different types of talent. The tool I have given you contains the quest refined by countless ancient masters. The quest will test you on another talent required by Cosmomancers. You want to learn the secret of Cosmomancy? We’ll talk after you’ve overcome the quest.”

Sungchul held the orbs and magic scroll separately. The orb contained magical energies, and the magic scroll was for a magic barrier.

“Also, make sure to use the scroll before attempting the quest. I don’t want this sacred structure of Cosmomancy harmed by your crude magic.”

Altugius spoke these words and puffed on his pipe while looking at Sungchul with a relatively relaxed expression on his face.

‘They had called me a rare genius that hadn’t been seen in

hundreds of years, and it still took me 14 months to complete that pinball quest. Even that Leonard who was praised as ‘once in a decade Genius’ couldn’t even think it was possible for himself to complete it. No matter how gifted and perseverant this man is, there is a limit to how far one can go with pure talent. This is not something he can solve easily.’

For those that can’t be forced away, one must confuse them with an overwhelming assignment. It was a saying handed down from ancient times within Airfruit’s school of Cosmomancy which held a particularly powerful Secret.

“....”

Sungchul looked over the orb first.

“Activate.”

When he uttered their activation command, the six orbs composed of gold, silver, bronze, steel, tin, and white gold flew into the sky and floated around Sungchul’s vicinity. A bright lettered message appeared before him.

[The Star of Cosmomancy]

[The Stars of Cosmomancy will orbit around your vicinity.]

[As the sovereign of these astral bodies, you must shoot down those that defy you with the Authority of Light.]

[The Stars that are in defiance will be dyed with darkness, so

observe carefully with both your eyes.]

[Please care to observe your surroundings before starting the trial so as to not create casualties.]

It was a ubiquitous type of quest among those he had experienced within Airfruit. It also used vague language that was typical of Airfruit's quests.

“What does the light's authority refer to? Is it talking about Glare?”

Altugius, who had been watching Sungchul, shouted with a loud voice.

“It's a trial for shooting down the dark orbs with Glare. The magic barrier was a one-time gift, so buy one at your expense before you reattempt the quest!”

The price of magic barrier seals was significant. They reached 50 silver coins in price, and their supply was low, so it was hard to get a hold of one. This was well within Altugius' intentions.

‘This quest takes up more than just a lot of effort. It also digs into the pocketbook of the one being tested. Let's see how that friend's talent fares in Cosmomancy magic.’

Altugius reclined to a more comfortable position as he looked over in Sungchul's direction. Sungchul had unravelled the seal and

was watching the orbs circling him.

[Shout the phrase ‘Begin’ once you are ready.]

Sungchul calmed the magical energy embedded into his body and took a shot towards the barrier.

‘Glare.’

A beam of light fired out from his fingertip and struck one part of the barrier before it disappeared. Altugius smiled with his eyes.

‘His magic power is still weak. It looks to be around 140, I think.’

Sungchul, who had tested out his magic, now turned to the orbs circling him and spoke quietly.

“Begin.”

[Level 1]

The path of the orbs circling him began to change. The golden orb suddenly became dyed in darkness and flew past his face. Sungchul didn’t hesitate in using his Glare. A beam of light shot

out from his finger to strike and peel away its darkness. One of Altugius' brows shot up.

‘Is it luck...?!’

After striking one orb, Sungchul turned his focus onto the copper orb rushing at him. The orb that had appeared from his blindspot flew past him and approached another blindspot when it began to dye itself in darkness. Sungchul's eyes had caught it, but his inexperience with magic caused his aim to waver and strike feebly onto the barrier.

‘As expected, beginner's luck. It couldn't have been anything else. For sure.’

Altugius pulled out his pipe and let out a sigh of relief.

Soon, the first level had finished.

[Your score]

[3/10 (Number of Heavenly Bodies struck / Number of Heavenly Bodies that defied you)]

[Judgement... Failure!]

“ ”

It was a shameful result for Sungchul. He could hear Altugius' laughter.

“Ha ha! It looks as though you're a bit lacking to be demanding the Secrets of Cosmomancy!”

The orbs that had been in Sungchul's orbit fell into their container. Sungchul pulled out a magic essence from his Soul Storage.

Altugius who had been laughing looked on with shock.

‘What? This guy also has a Soul Storage?’

Sungchul drank two bottles of magic essence in a single breath, dropped them onto the floor, then rubbed the orb once again.

“Activate.”

It wasn't just a grudge. The first attempt at the test was nothing more than an attempt to adjust his sights. His perception honed to its absolute limits and decades of combat experience were not just for show. During the first test, after missing his 2nd shot, he focused on improving his control over the output of the spell rather than its accuracy. And by the final shot, he had already commanded complete control over the spell as he scored a hit.

“Begin.”

There was nothing to stop him once he managed to get a feel for it. He looked on at the orbs spinning dizzily around him. Altugius felt an unusual aura surrounding him, but he ignored it and continued smoking his pipe.

The first orb soon became dyed in darkness and flew past Sungchul's face.

‘Glare.’

The beam of light shot out from his finger and accurately struck the centre of the orb, peeling away the darkness. The second one with the tricky flight path flew past him from his blindspot to another blindspot as before. Sungchul didn't flinch as he took a step back and smoothly shot the orb to peel away its darkness.

Altugius' eyes flew open.

‘No... that one?!’

In the first level, the second orb was known to be the most difficult target. It was the quest host's intention to throw off the tester's balance with a high difficulty curve ball that would affect his future attempts within the level. However, this mysterious man overcame that second shot with ease. He continued striking every other orb in their tricky flight paths with little difficulty. Altugius ended up dropping his pipe after the brief storm that was the duration of the test.

[Your score]

[10/10 (Number of Heavenly Bodies struck / Number of Heavenly bodies that defied you)]

[Judgement... Pass!]

Sungchul looked at the score that appeared before him with disinterest and drank another magic essence.

[Astounding! You have completed the first level with a perfect score.]

Reward: +3 magic power, +3 Intuition, +3 Dexterity

It even raised Dexterity unlike a typical mage quest, but the quest wouldn't be able to raise Sungchul's dexterity.

[Error! Your Dexterity is higher than the Dexterity of the quest host, and thus you will not be able to receive the boost in dexterity.]

Quests gave an opportunity for unspecified people to receive boosts in stats, but unless it was like the Devil in the basement who gave out his stats, it wouldn't raise the recipient's stats beyond the one of the quest's host. There weren't many who could exceed

Sungchul in his physical stats. This was also the reason that Sungchul didn't bother much with the quests of the Seven Heroes other than the Mage heroes. He was sure that there was no one among the Seven Heroes who could come close to his physical stats.

[Would you like to begin Level 2?]

Sungchul's eyes were now focused on the next level, and Altugius couldn't take his eyes off from the figure of the indescribably amazing man.

Chapter 49 – Stinkbug (2)

Magicians generally preferred and were trained to fight one-sided battles that could be handled elegantly with no risk of injury. Combat vision, quick judgement, psychological warfare, ability to respond to developing situations, quick reflexes. These sweaty, crude, broad categories of combat were largely ignored. However, within the school of Cosmomancy or at least the observatory run by Altugius, there was a different atmosphere.

The Stars of Cosmomancy, or pinball as more commonly called, was more of a physical training that emphasized quick reflexes and the ability to deal with extraneous circumstances rather than being actual magic training. Sungchul grew surer of his assumption as he drew closer to the third level of the Star of Cosmomancy. The dark stars no longer lingered around his vicinity. They either rushed in recklessly or attacked him discreetly, and they ceaselessly and ferociously drove him to a corner.

The Stars of Cosmomancy tested more than just reflex and quick response; a particular star was designed to be too quick and irregular to hit.

Sungchul was initially stumped, but he discovered that this star, too, had a complex pattern designed to disguise its repetitive nature. Using suppressive fire, Sungchul was able to push its movements to its limits and was able to obtain a point without much trouble.

“I can’t believe this even as I watch it.”

Every time Sungchul achieved victory, Altugius' breath grew increasingly rough. His eyes didn't see an amateur recently spat out by the Summoning Palace, but rather a master's expertise honed by dozens of years of swordplay.

‘Is he a genius... or is he truly a swordsman?’

The stats noted on Sungchul was barely adequate for an apprentice mage, and his strange movements could be better associated with experience rather than his sheer stats. When calm finally settled in the observatory, Altugius instinctively knew that the man of unknown origins would be the very first figure to break through the Star of Cosmomancy in a single day since the conception of the Airfruit branch of the school of Cosmomancy.

Sungchul lazily looked over the rewards that appeared before him as he opened his status window.

[Stats]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Vitality 801 Magic Power 151

Intuition 131 Magic Resist 621

Resolve 502 Charisma 18

Luck 18

It was still an unsatisfactory amount, but to other people, his

growth could be considered nothing short of miraculous. Altugius thought along the same lines.

‘Is this man... a monster?’

The ‘monster’ approached Altugius and pushed the box containing the orbs back into his possession.

“Now that I have passed the trials as you’ve requested, will you pass me the Secret?”

“Y-You have yet to complete all the trials!”

To be exact, he wasn’t quite prepared yet. His heart wasn’t prepared to accept this astounding result. Altugius pardoned himself with nonsensical excuses like a pouting child and turned him away for the moment.

“Return for now. I have some thinking to do!”

Sungchul looked at Altugius passively and nodded.

“I understand. I’ll return tomorrow.”

He had passed the trial in one go, but it was a trial that consumed significant amounts of mana. Sungchul felt that he was quickly approaching the threshold of magic power that Bertelgia had talked about. This was why he obediently followed Altugius’

request.

‘But when I return tomorrow, your heart better be ready for what needs to happen.’

After Sungchul left the observatory, Altugius felt heavy fatigue wearing down on his aged shoulders. Too many things happened at the same time. Time alone was the medicine to calm the turbulence of the mind, but reality wouldn’t give him the opportunity.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Someone knocked upon the observatory door.

“Who is it?”

When Altugius asked, a cold, emotionless voice responded from beyond the door.

“I have brought the item sent by the Inquisitor of Heresy.”

“Leave it at the front.”

When the footsteps faded away, Altugius dragged his old yet spry body towards the door; A large sack full of gold coins was left there. Altugius let out a sigh and placed it into his own Soul Storage. He looked down at the panoramic view of the school

beneath the cliff of the mountain as he put the sack away. The view that opened up beneath his feet wasn't much different than the view he had seen when he first stepped foot into the observatory as the professor of Cosmomancy, but he knew better than anyone that the school had begun heading down the path of no return.

The face of a certain somebody appeared clearly on his mind as he looked on at the faded scenery. The man, with an impressive beard that had gone partially gray, had a mild temper but lead the teaching staff with his powerful voice and strong personality. The world would remember him as The Grand Magnus, the final headmaster of Airfruit. Altugius recalled the final conversations he had with the man who had been a friend for most of his life. The man told him thusly:

“The world is a sea, and we are but rafts floating on top of it. The rafts can navigate the sea, but it cannot affect the sea in any way. We can only acknowledge the flow of the world. That is all.”

It wasn't widely known, but The Grand Magnus was a Follower of Calamity. He sought to leave behind achievements as a Follower of Calamity, but he died by Altugius' hands. Altugius believed his decision to be correct at the time, but after these three years, his resolution was wavering.

“If only I had died instead by that bastard's hands at that time...”

Sungchul was on route to the House of Recollections.

Growl...

Maybe it was due to the amount of concentration spent on the trials; he felt quite ravenous. It was his policy to always eat something delicious when he was hungry. He expended some of his own effort to prepare food when he was in the middle of nowhere, but a must for foodies is the exploration of hidden restaurants. He began scrolling through his memory to seek out the hidden gems within Golden City, but the food joint of his memories had become some guild's office that he had never heard of.

“Hey, Mr. Summoned! What are you doing here? Are you perhaps here to apply to our guild?”

The man standing guard in front of the guild with an overbite called out to Sungchul.

“... I have no business here.”

Sungchul ignored him and moved on to the next location, but when he walked along the main street, a familiar face appeared. It was Philrus, the professor of Alchemy, and his disciples.

“Shit! Trash discovered!”

Bertelgia peeked out from this pocket and lightly shook her body. Basil soon discovered Sungchul. He suddenly looked quite amiable and began talking to Sungchul.

“Hey~ Look who it is? Isn’t it my best pupil?!”

Sungchul looked on with an indifferent expression. It was because he couldn’t recall ever becoming that man’s disciple.

Basil laughed awkwardly, scratching his head, he opened his mouth once again.

“Ahaha! Man, Isn’t it a bit hot around here?”

“If you’ll excuse me.”

Sungchul squeezed past Basil and his students. Their view of Sungchul had changed compared to the day they had first met him at the run-down tents. Their eyes were filled with envy, greed, jealousy, and the like. Sungchul did not lock eyes with anyone of them and walked past quickly. It was at this moment when Basil followed along at a quick pace and struck up another conversation with great affection.

“Where are you headed to?”

“To eat.”

“If that’s the case, why not join us? You are a part of the school of Alchemy after all.”

“....”

When Sungchul grew silent, Basil carefully looked at him and asked.

“Why not? Perhaps... you don’t want to eat with us...”

“I am quite picky with food. I don’t want to go somewhere that’s not up to par.”

When he heard this, Basil broke into a satisfied smile and pulled Sungchul close.

“Then that’s great. We are planning on going somewhere with a great chef!”

“Is that so?”

Sungchul’s frozen heart melted slightly. Regardless of everything, Basil was someone that had resided within the Golden City for quite a while. It might be faster for him to rely on the man for good food. Sungchul pleasantly agreed with such thoughts.

“Ok. I’ll trust you this time.”

“If you trust my words, you’ll be glad that you took heed of my advice. My words are good.”

Basil's eyes were filled with confidence as they always were. After a while...

[This food's score is... 18!]

As someone of the chef class, Sungchul could see the score of dishes he tasted.

“Mmm....”

He had expected the score to be a bit low as Basil's wallet was tight and he had ordered the cheapest food with the largest quantity, but that wasn't the only reason. No matter how cheap the food was, there was a standard that must be maintained. He took another bite.

[This food's score is... 17!]

“...”

A flicker of anger leaked onto Sungchul's face. It was a bit of rage that was kept in check even during Leonard's flurry of insults.

‘This isn't meant for human consumption.’

What was laid in front of Sungchul was an intestine soup made mainly from pig intestine and potatoes that had been flavored with enough spices to numb the tongue.

‘Its preparation was half-assed. They didn’t even bother to remove the undesirable smells from the intestine. The chef only bothered to suppress the disgusting scent with strong spices, and he completely failed.’

The other dishes were the same. They were decorated to look decent, but the flavor entirely depended on strong spices.

‘There is no narcotics used here, but there are some addictive substances to flavor it that are quite similar.’

Sungchul managed to unravel all of the secrets behind the dish with a couple of bites. This wasn’t something he would dare call food. It lacked any sort of dedication or consideration for those eating it. It was just a dish made to be sold in large quantities for profit. Despite all this, the restaurant was packed. Whether this was due to the people of Golden City having crude tastes or the provocative dish serving its purpose, it was clear that the restaurant was thriving.

“Is the food not to your tastes? The dish of the greatest restaurant of Golden City?”

Basil asked after cleaning up his food gluttonously as he noticed that Sungchul hadn’t touched his dish. Sungchul nodded, excused

himself quietly, then rose from his seat.

“Where are you going?”

“To get a bit of air.”

Sungchul followed the street around the restaurant to peek into the kitchen. He witnessed a traumatic scene within. Sungchul’s eyes grew wide in shock.

“Now! Now! We must quickly make the fodder for humans!”

“Just scoop out a bit of the poop inside the pig intestines and wash it once or twice! The tastes of the people of this city have already adjusted to the taste of pig shit!

It was the Homunculi that were handling the food. They were pretending to be chefs, going as far as donning chef hats, and were carrying out the directions of another homunculus who was giving orders and preparing the meal. The actual chef of the restaurant was handed the food prepared by these homunculi and created the dishes by caking it entirely with enough spices to paralyze the tastebuds before putting it up for the customers.

“They are finding flavor in food soaked in pig shit water! Filthy humans!”

One of the homunculi shouted as he soaked vegetables in the water used to wash off the intestines. The other homunculus

bothered to wipe down the containers piled up to the side, but Sungchul's angry expression didn't relax.

“Mmmm...”

He had only wasted his appetite.

‘I should have just made the food myself to eat.’

Sungchul firmly decided to bid Basil farewell and returned to the restaurant, but a group of mages wearing familiar clothing stood in front of the restaurant's entrance. Their uniform dyed in blue. They were the mages of the school of Cryomancy.

“Iya~ It's been so long since we ate here.”

“My guts are going wild. Let's enjoy a proper meal.”

The cryomancers were looking quite excited. They were licking their lips as they entered the restaurant and smiled as the scent of spices within the restaurant entered their nose. The one who looked the oldest among them spoke with the maître d'.

Sungchul took a step back and watched them conversate.

“We are 10 here. Do you have room?”

The maître d' paled at the question.

“U...um. As you can see, it is a full house.”

The cryomancer looked displeased as he glared at the maître d', and looked about the restaurant. The man finally smirked and looked back towards the maître d'.

“Look, there is room over there.”

His finger pointed towards a corner of the restaurant where a group of students were eating the cheapest meal with gluttonous vigor. It was the school of Alchemy.

“But dear customer, those customers have not finished their meals yet...”

“I'll talk to them myself, so just prepare the food. Bring out the most expensive meal with the most expensive booze. The money is here.”

The man smirked as he handed a shiny gold coin to the maître d'. Sungchul's eyes flashed with a strange light as he saw the gold coin.

‘It is the unmarked gold coin.’

It looked as though Robert had begun circulating the gold coins

he had received from Sungchul to his subordinates already. This meant that the battle between the ones that killed Christian and the Followers of Calamity was going begin in earnest. Sungchul had planned on taking a step back and quietly watching the two fight, and when the opportune moment arrived...

As Sungchul was drawing out plans for the future in his mind, a crowd of students looking quite upset headed towards his direction. It was the Professor of Alchemy and his students that had been eating excitedly just before they lost their spot.

“Those sons of bitches... Not even dogs are bothered during a meal.”

“I want to get out of the school of Alchemy.”

Sungchul looked over at Basil and his students, who had to leave their spot with slumped shoulders at the cost of chump change, and opened his mouth as though he was waiting for them.

“Thank you for the meal.”

The food was atrocious, but more than that, he had managed to get meaningful information. He could always eat some more food at the dorms, but information wasn't so easy to come by.

Sungchul returned to the dorms with a light heart, when he felt an unusual aura seeping from the dormitory.

‘A sound seal?!’

The seal often used by assassins had been cast over the entirety of the dormitory.

At the same time, a dark shadow was drawing over Altugius as well.

‘The vigilance seal over the House of Recollections has been severed?! Is Sarasa in danger?’

Altugius hurriedly dragged his aged body from his seat and pulled out the staff from his Soul Storage. When he swung his staff, the magic formation of the lift carved on the exterior of the observatory lit up as it activated. He rushed to enter the lift.

But before he had managed to even take a few steps, a chilling light flashed before his eyes. Altugius reflexively deflected the light with Glare.

Clunk.

A sword that had been partially burned away rolled on the floor. Altugius’ expression changed. He was suddenly staring at the dark robed assailant that stood in his path.

“Where are you rushing off to, Altugius?”

He had heard the man's voice behind the feline mask before. Kaz Almeira. The bastard had sought out this place once again.

Chapter 50 – Stinkbug (3)

“Get out of my way. I don’t have time to deal with you.”

Altugius felt his stomach burning a hole in itself from impatience, but Kaz walked leisurely with a chilling aura about him as though he knew of the exact situation.

“I had always been curious about this... How did some pathetic mage manage to kill the Assassin Guild’s vice-captain?”

Altugius tried to move past him in hopes to salvage even a second of time, but the assassin named Kaz stood in his path once again as to obstruct him purposely.

“Disappear from my sight if you don’t want to die.”

“It looks like that mage was telling the truth. Looking how you’re so impatient with your weakness exposed.”

Kaz made a sinister smile as he approached Altugius.

“That mage? Who are you talking about?”

Altugius’ face grew ugly. He already knew the answer.

‘Leonard. That bastard. Did he actually...?!’

The assassin pulled out two blades and released his chilling aura instead of a proper answer.

Shiiing.

The cold blade flashed in front of Altugius' eyes.

It was the moment when he broke through the sound sealing barrier.

CRASH!

A corner of the second floor came crashing down. Sungchul saw wooden planks flying about and realised that a battle was taking place within the House of Recollections.

‘Who’s fighting whom?’

Through the newly created hole on the floor, he witnessed a blonde girl in robes escaping while deploying magic formations. It was Sarasa.

The man chasing her from behind was wearing a red uniform.

‘Isn’t that Leonard?’

He was laughing maniacally as he poured Glare toward Sarasa without restraint.

“Eeehehehe! Die! Die!!”

They disappeared to the far side of the hold, and another blast of sound struck the ear drums.

“....”

Sungchul broke through the second floor hole and saw them. Sarasa and Leonard were both glaring at each other and continuing their fight. The decorum of battle had yet to break down, and also, it wouldn't be too late to intervene later. Sungchul erased his presence and disappeared into the darkness.

“Why are you attacking me?”

Sarasa spat out a breath of cold air as she asked her question. Leonard answered with a smiling face.

“I don't have any personal feelings towards you one way or the other. What could I want from a corpse like yourself?”

Sungchul thought on that reply. There had to be a reason for Leonard's sudden action. He always looked to be mentally on edge, but he was no fool. At the very least, he should be aware that a

vigilance seal was protecting Sarasa's residence, and that disturbing her would cause the terrifying Altugius to charge over right away. There had to be a reason for which he still initiated this situation.

Sungchul discovered the reason from Leonard's appearance. His face had a bluish tint like that of a zombie. Also, his clothes had been torn away at the shoulder revealing bumpy holes along his backside. Sungchul knew what this meant.

‘Someone planted some venomous bugs inside his body. It looks like the handiwork of the Grimada Family of the Four Families of the Assassin's Guild, but why is he also missing an ear?’

The insect eggs embedded into the body. The torn off ear. Sungchul immediately came to a simple conclusion that combined both of these facts.

‘The Assassin's Guild has involved itself.’

There was no way to determine the reason for their involvement, nor should one ever try to find out. They were a group that would do anything for proper compensation, and they would kill anyone for any number of reasons.

“I'm not the bad guy here. It's your gramps that's the villain. If that old bag had just taught me the Secret of Cosmomancy, it wouldn't have had to come to this.”

Leonard Sanctum was letting out flames from his staff for intimidation. On the other hand, Sarasa stood as still as ice surrounded herself, glaring back at him with a chilling stare. But she was unable to bring the full extent of her might to bear.

It was due to a small scratch left on her face. Leonard had aimed for her face during his ambush and disrupted a portion of the preservation magic put on her body.

Such a small wound would appear harmless, but it was actually a fatal strike against Sarasa since utilizing a large amount of mana while the preservation magic was in disarray would lead to an extremely rapid decay of her face. It was a cheap and cowardly trick fitting of Leonard.

“ ... ”

Sarasa, who didn't want to lose her face, could only remain defensive.

‘If I can drag this one, it'll be my victory.’

“Kyuing...”

The Sky Squirrel in Sarasa's pocket was suffering from the frosty air surrounding her. She whispered in a small voice.

“Please hold on a bit longer...”

She glared at Leonard who was mocking her and suddenly gathered her magic power.

“Ice Wall!”

A wall of ice unfolded between Leonard and Sarasa. Sarasa attempted to retreat at that moment quickly, but Leonard shattered it with a blast of magic power as soon as the wall was erected as though he had been anticipating it.

“Where are you off to?! Let’s play some more! Meat puppet!”

Sarasa still wasn’t exerting all of her strength, but she expertly fended off Leonard’s attacks. However, her skin was losing its vigour and began wrinkling as the battle went on. A small bit of respite came after a lengthy exchange of blows and neither were seriously hurt, but Sarasa was clearly exhausted.

“Whew...”

However, Sarasa did not lose her fighting spirit. She had someone to trust.

‘If I hold on a bit longer, Grampa will come.’

It was at that moment Leonard opened his mouth.

“Are you perhaps thinking it’ll be okay if you buy some time?”

He struck the heart of the matter.

“....”

Sarasa’s eyes that contained a glowing blue light glared at Leonard. He smirked before spilling his spiel.

“Stupid. No matter how long you wait, Altugius isn’t coming.”

When she heard this, Sarasa’s eyes shook violently.

“What are you talking about?”

“Someone real scary is planning on getting in his way. There is also a sound sealing barrier cast outside. No one will come to help you nor save you.”

Leonard, who could wield two magic markings, held a ball of light in one hand and a ball of fire in the other. He was now prepared to finish her off.

“Why do you think I assaulted you? Wouldn’t I have come at you before otherwise? Now that things have gotten this far, I don’t plan on showing you any mercy.”

“Do as you will.”

Sarasa’s eyes radiated a chilling light. Leonard let out a laugh.

“I’ll tell you what I’m going to do to you. Listen carefully. I’m going to take you down and make a piece of art while you still hold breath.”

“A piece of art?”

“Yep. An awe-striking masterpiece that will be enough to sweep that old man off his feet.”

Leonard’s eyes became dyed in lunacy.

“You’re insane.”

Sarasa spat back coldly, but it had shaken her. The lunacy in Leonard’s eyes held no doubt.

“I’ll say this again, but you have no fault in this. If you want to blame anyone, blame your gramps. The same gramps that turned me into this!”

Sarasa gathered all the magic power available to block the combination of light and fire, but she felt strained. Something unexpected also occurred.

“Kyuing...”

The Sky Squirrel couldn't endure the chill any longer and fainted. Sarasa, who could feel this, lost her concentration and was lightly tossed toward a wall with a scream. The fight had ended.

“Ehehehe!”

Leonard walked toward Sarasa.

“Should I call this the silver lining? I really thought the world was ending when that fucker beat me, put eggs in my body, and cut off my ear. Who could have thought that it was a shortcut to such sweet revenge?”

Leonard had a greater hatred for Altugius' relative than for the assassin who had cut off his ear. It was due to the grudge from what he believed to be Altugius' betrayal added by the rationale that none of this would have occurred if Altugius hadn't cast him out.

“Don't fret. Once I kill the lot of you, I'll soon follow.”

“What?”

Sarasa asked with a pained expression.

“There is no way that guy will stand by once he figures out that

you guys have nothing to do with the World's Enemy. Well, maybe it's better this way. I can haunt you guys after death."

Leonard pulled out a single blade in his possession.

"Now, what kind of masterpiece shall I make!"

As Leonard's blade flashed, a man revealed himself from the shadows.

"...."

Leonard felt the sudden presence and turned around. His eyes overflowing with lunacy shook violently. It was Sungchul.

"Who is this?"

Leonard abandoned Sarasa and headed to Sungchul like a predator who found a tastier prey.

"I was meaning to find you for some fun."

"Just answer my question."

Sungchul suddenly spoke.

"What?"

“You said that the assassin was looking for the World’s Enemy. Is this correct?”

Leonard laughed instead of replying.

“What does it matter to a fucker like...”

It was as he was about to finish his sentence, Sungchul’s crude hand wrapped around Leonard’s face and he plummeted him toward the ground. The floor shattered and Leonard’s face was embedded halfway into the floor.

Fear flashed across Leonard’s face, but it was already too late for regrets. Sungchul grabbed his head and smashed it onto the floor.

Smash! Smash! Smash!

It continued repeatedly. Indecipherable whimper spilt out of Leonard’s mouth.

“S-save me! S...v...! Me!”

Sungchul relaxed the grip on his head. Instead, he grabbed Leonard’s body and stomped on the places that the venomous bugs had planted their eggs with his military boots.

Pop! Pop!

The insects embedded into Leonard's body writhed violently on being squashed by Sungchul's military boots. Every time they were thrashed, it transferred directly into Leonard as pain.

“KWAAAAAAAAAAK!”

Leonard twisted his body wildly like a beast struck by lightning. Sarasa held the Sky Squirrel with both hands and watched the scene with concern and surprise.

After a series of torture had ended, Sungchul once again asked his question to Leonard.

“Answer me, mage. If you don't remember my question, I'll gladly remind you.”

Leonard choked on some air before spitting out his answer as soon as Sungchul's question finished.

“T-That's right! That guy... he was looking for the World's Enemy! He asked... where the World's Enemy was... and for me to find him... that's why...”

He was already halfway gone. Sungchul held Leonard's right arm and pulled it off.

“KWAAAAA!”

The presence of magic is known to be varied among people, but it is commonly gathered in the right hand. As such, those without the use of their right hand cannot use magic.

Sungchul tossed Leonard, who had become an invalid, to the side and approached Sarasa.

“Are you injured?”

“No injuries, but... who are you?”

Sarasa’s eyes sparkled.

“... I am a passing freshman.”

At that moment, he could hear a familiar shout.

“Sarasa! Sarasa! Are you here?”

It was Altugius’s voice. It was ragged and out of breath, but the vigour behind it was unchanged. Sungchul noticed a dark fog following behind him.

‘Is that the assassin?’

Sungchul extended a hand toward Sarasa.

“Go and tell your grandfather of your state.”

Sarasa nodded and grabbed his hand. It was rough and sophisticated, but it was a dependable hand. Holding Sungchul's hand, she righted herself before approaching the dormitory window and waved to her grandfather.

“Grampa! Here! Over here! I'm fine!”

Altugius who had been wandering the yard heard her voice and raised his head. After confirming her safety, a small tear formed in his eyes. However, it was only a brief moment before he poured out a fearsome aura as he turned around.

“Now, shall we start this for real?”

The dark fog following Altugius dissipated as soon as he heard those words.

“Mmm. That useless bastard. Looks like he failed.”

Kaz who had been bothering Altugius as a fog returned to his human form and retreated a step. He looked as though he had lost interest and looked towards Sarasa.

‘Mm?’

He noticed a certain man. Kaz combed through his memories to recall that the man was at the School of Cosmomancy building. It was the most worthless of the three, but he could feel some strange presence from the man that he couldn't quite place. The feeling didn't last long as a powerful Glare shot from Altugius was aiming to take his life.

Kaz returned to his fog form before leisurely leaving the scene. Once Altugius confirmed that his enemy had left, he ran over to Sarasa's side. An emotional reunion soon followed.

Sungchul took a step back and watched their reunion with indifferent eyes.

“Leonard Sanctum. How dare you do such a thing.”

Altugius, who heard the whole story, looked over at Leonard who was half dead with eyes full of pity.

“When I first saw you, I thought of you as a rough gemstone. You had outstanding talent and potential, and I figured you were someone who was good enough to take up my mantle within Airfruit.”

Realising that his former student's death was not far, Altugius unhesitatingly poured out his heart. Leonard, who had been slumped over letting out an incoherent whimper, trembled weakly.

“But, you couldn’t hold yourself back and committed too many sins. God has given you talent, but he has also given you an utterly lacking container for such talents. Leonard Sanctum. This is all I have to say to you.”

Could he have truly understood the meaning behind Altugius’ words?

Leonard was hunched over like a shrimp and let out an indecipherable scream. Something was crawling out of his back. It was a stinkbug with a pattern sparkling like a jewel. Sungchul didn’t hesitate in walking over Leonard’s corpse and stomped on the stinkbug.

“Did you... save my granddaughter?”

Altugius spoke to Sungchul with a shaking voice. Sungchul nodded.

“But.. How could you... he should have been an opponent that you couldn’t win against.”

“That’s not important. What I want is one thing only: the Secret of Cosmomancy.”

Altugius could see it once again. The eyes of Sungchul were firm and determined, unclouded by doubt.

‘Just who could this man be?’

It was something he could never know even if dozens of years had passed. The only thing he was sure of was that the man was destined for greatness in the field of magic. Altugius decided to not refuse that fate any longer and nodded.

“Fine. In return for saving my granddaughter, who is to say anything about handing over a Secret of a dying school. I’m not sure if it’ll be enough to repay you.”

The Secret of Cosmomancy was finally in his grasp, but at that moment, Sungchul could hear the noise of countless military boots entering the sound sealing barrier.

“Kyu Kyu!”

The Sky Squirrel cried out nervously from Sarasa’s grasp. Soon, Sungchul’s companions could confirm the identity of the unwelcome guest.

“Altugius Xero!”

It was the minions of the Inquisitor of Heresy. The man had unfurled a long scroll and began to shout loudly.

“You have been charged with heresy and/or abetting heresy along with the crime of murder of a devout follower and 13 other criminal charges, and thus we have come to apprehend you.”

Chapter 51 – The Hunt (1)

Altugius looked towards the Inquisitor of Heresy with disbelief.

“No... How did you...”

The Inquisitor of Heresy shoved past the surrounding people and approached Altugius. He spoke to him in a quiet voice that only Altugius could hear.

“This is an act. All for the effort of restoring your school.”

The entire situation was like a bolt from the blue, but if the Inquisitor said it so, then it is as he said. Altugius’ eyes shook restlessly, but his shoulders finally gave way and accepted the situation. The Inquisitor’s minions bound Altugius and gagged his mouth.

“Grandpa!”

Sarasa ran towards the minions with a sad look on her face, but Altugius only shook his head. His words couldn’t be understood at the moment due to the gag around his mouth, but he sent out a warm gaze instead. Finally, he looked towards Sungchul. He tried to signal Sungchul with his eyes, but Sungchul was also trying to convey something. He had a rigid expression as he shook his head, then glared coldly at the Inquisitor.

‘Does he mean not to trust the Inquisitor of Heresy?’

There wasn't much time for thought. The Inquisitor of Heresy, Magnus Maxima, left the building and his minions roughly dragged Altugius along with them. When the crowd of people left, the pale girl and the silent man were left with the cold corpse.

“W-what should we do? What should we do now?”

Too many things happened at once. Sarasa could feel all of her strength leaving her body as she collapsed where she stood.

“W-what should I do now?”

She suddenly became alone. There was no one left to look after her. To make matters worse, the preservation magic contained in her left cheek had been shattered, causing her skin to start withering slowly. She would soon lose her beauty until she would look no different than any other liches with their mummified face. Despite all this, the thing that shook her most deeply was the frustration of the unforeseeable future unfolding in front of her. It was at this moment when sorrow replaced despair. She felt enough pain to make her chest ache, but her eyes could not shed a single tear. The dead cannot cry.

It was at that moment.

“Get up.”

The man of mystery spoke firmly yet with force.

“Stand up and face reality.”

It was a simple command, but his words contained some strange persuasiveness. Sarasa found herself righting herself as he had told her to. The preservation in her right arm was partially destroyed during the battle causing her right arm to also decay like a corpse.

“How should I meet this reality?”

Sungchul pointed towards the House of Recollections at the words of Sarasa, who had turned into a half corpse at this point.

“When there is nothing you can do, you will have to rely on someone you trust and just wait.

Sungchul let those words linger and walked forward.

“Wait here. Without fear. Time will give you an answer.”

Sarasa tightly made a fist and nodded. Sungchul stood before the sound sealing barrier which was on the verge of collapse and spoke once more.

“Don’t forget to feed the Sky Squirrel.”

He then stepped past the barrier.

‘That assassin. He was looking for me.’

He had no intention of returning empty handed today.

Kaz Almeida was a genius among geniuses within the family that came around once a decade. He had narrowly escaped the threshold of the era of extinction and had all the qualities of an assassin such as brutality, precision, and patience in spades along with his innate talent, allowing him to master a variety of assassination techniques from the maternal family along with the paternal family.

He also carried the inevitable characteristic of arrogance that all geniuses had, but for him, it was closer to a form of confidence from knowing the exact measure of his abilities than true arrogance. He put himself in extreme situations and enjoyed pulling himself out of any obstacle, and he managed to gain great benefits from this dangerous method. The Almeida family was wary of his methods while ultimately doing nothing to restrict him.

“Thanks to the commotion you’ve created in Airfruit, our existence has been made aware to the Inquisitor of Heresy. If I didn’t make negotiations, we would have had the Order of Purity, the Enemy of the World, and the Followers of Calamity beset us on all three sides.”

D’Vici sternly scolded his son, but he knew that his words were falling on deaf ears.

“Ah~ I don’t know, father. I only heard that the mage held hands with the World’s Enemy and decided to take a stab at it.”

“So, was Altugius someone you could handle?”

“He was plenty powerful. Honestly, I might lose by myself. That guy is a magician, but moved with the dexterity of an archer and suppressed me with magic that was difficult to dodge while sneaking in a powerful spell.”

Kaz spoke without any particular joy in his expression or voice. Pict, who had been watching beside them, rose from his seat to leave. He didn’t want to look at his more powerful and successful brother. Kaz peeked over at his brother’s backside as he spoke again.

“But father, I have learned it. I learned what Altugius’ secret is.”

“Is that so?”

“That person is hiding a weapon called dimension magic. It was remarkable. If I hadn’t retreated halfway through the fight, I would have been flattened like the Vice-captain.”

“It won’t be too late to explain all of this later. For now, go to your dwelling and confine yourself.”

“Yes, I understand.”

Kaz, who was returning from his scolding, met his youngest brother Pict again. Pict looked as though he was waiting for Kaz. He laughed as soon as he saw Kaz.

“I’m going to be hunting the Followers of Calamity right now.”

“Ah? Is that right? With your strength?”

When Kaz mocked him, Pict gave him a frosty glare and left.

“Let’s see how long you can mock me for. Ten years. I’ll catch up to you in ten years, you bastard.”

“Calling your brother a bastard. You bitch. Did I let you have it too easy for too long?”

“You only got the respect you wrought. Anyways, just wait for me.”

Pict stuck out his tongue and disappeared into the darkness in a hurry. Kaz looked at such a brother with a smile and shook his head.

“Catch up to me? You’ll have to train for at least a 1000 years.”

He said this, but he knew that his brother was a possessor of great talent. That kid handled his first torture brilliantly. He unmistakably had the assassin's characteristic of brutality and apathy toward his victims.

‘Brat. Once you’re a bit older, I’ll guide you myself.’

Pict was too lacking for Kaz to teach himself, but he planned on going on assassinations together with Pict after his brother managed to gather some experience and intuition under his belt. Without knowing his brother had such intentions, Pict could only make himself the victim.

“A genius my ass! I’ll teach you that true geniuses need time to cultivate.”

Pict’s mission of the day was to hunt down the Followers of Calamity picked out by the Inquisitor of Heresy. D’vici had told him it was enough to hunt down a single one, but Pict had decided for himself to find 3 of them and interrogate them at once. He had failed his first interrogation due to a covenant that bound the man, but he knew he could succeed this time. He could still vividly feel his blade cutting through his victim’s flesh.

“Let’s see.”

There were magicians wearing robes dyed in blue on the other side of the road. They were insignificant in Pict’s eyes. They were weak folks that could be killed with a single slice, but his objective was live capture. He began to stalk the magicians while waiting for

his opportunity. His deft movements allowed him to roam from alley to alley while pursuing the magicians diligently and watched with bated breath as the magicians retreated to their individual quarters.

As beasts lowered their guards within their nests, humans were also the most relaxed within their beds. Christian, the slave hunter, was also captured in his bed. Pict relived the sensation of that day and revealed himself slowly from the darkness. It was at that moment when he discovered a vague figure reflecting in the moonlight standing on the ground beside him.

“....?!”

There was no time to react before a hand gripped his throat. It contained a tremendous amount of strength. When the grip held his throat, he felt a terrifying pain as if his eyes would pop out and his brain would burst.

“Ugh!”

Rather than the cry of a person, it sounded like something from an ugly fowl. The man who held his throat soon spoke.

“Are you guys the ones responsible for killing a slave hunter named Christian?”

That person’s identity was Sungchul. He relaxed his grip on the young assassin’s throat ever so slightly with indifferent eyes.

“Answer the question.”

Instantly, Pict tried to squeeze all the strength in his body to let out a scream to call upon his family that had surrounded the area, but Sungchul’s reaction on his throat was faster than the time it took for the voice to spill out from his throat.

“Kwek!”

Pict could feel the voice being squelched within his throat and his vision being dyed with a yellow tint.

‘Assassins are a tenacious bunch as expected.’

Assassins of the Assassin’s Guild were taught to tolerate pain from an early age. The result was that half-assed interrogations had no effect at all. Not only that, the greatest virtue of assassins were to put their mission ahead of their lives. They were actively developing and practising countless methods of suicide in case any secrets could be leaked. Pict was also thinking up methods of taking his life.

‘This... looks to be my limit.’

He firmly decided to take his life regardless of the method at the first opportunity. However, Sungchul would not relinquish such an easy death to the assassin. Sungchul discovered torture tools and some effective medicine on Pict’s body. He tore Pict’s clothes and

shoved it down his throat before striking his right arm. Pict's arm twisted in a strange direction before being torn away in a mess. Pict thrashed about wildly, but he couldn't let out a scream.

“I have no intention of interrogating you, assassin.”

Sungchul applied Pict's medicine to the open wound before hanging the feline mask to the wall with Pict's arm placed below it; then he wrote a message with the blood flowing from Pict's open wound.

[If you wish to save the kid, come inside. You must come alone.]

Sungchul forcefully turned Pict's head to have him witness the message.

“You lot sure like to think your level of brutality is something spectacular.”

Sungchul dragged Pict in a way so that his stump of an arm, which bled despite the medicine, painted the floor red and then threw him into a storage room. The bloodstain marked the route from the feline mask to the storage room like a red carpet.

“Today, I'll teach you something on brutality.”

Sungchul leapt onto the roof of a building where he had a clear view of both the mask and the storage room. A different assassin soon followed in. It was Mayra who dealt in venomous insects. She

flinched at the scene of Pict's mask and amputated right arm. They were assassins trained to tolerate great amounts of physical pain, but in the end, they were still human. They were apathetic towards their victims but warm towards one of their own. She hesitated again at the message written in Pict's blood, but she stepped forward as though she had already prepared her heart.

‘No! Sister! Don’t come in!’

Pict flailed about with all his might, but it was all pointless. Mayra mentally prepared herself for battle and slowly moved step by step into the storage room. It didn't take long before a dark shadow appeared behind her.

The man had appeared like a ghost. Before she had time to blink, he grabbed the back of her head and lifted her straight up only to smash it down into the ground and grind her face against the rough floor. The feline mask shattered and Mayra's bloodied face revealed itself.

“Uwaaaak!”

Sungchul, who had shredded her face, tied a rope around her neck and lifted her above him. The person's body spun around like some toy. At that moment, all the venomous insects hidden on her body rained down onto the floor. Mayra gripped the rope tied around her neck with both her hands with all of her strength, but ultimately succumbed to exhaustion and fell unconscious.

Sungchul had no intention of allowing her a comfortable death

either. He slugged her bloodied face to wake her up before hanging her upside down in front of Pict. Sungchul glared at Pict before speaking in a steady voice.

“Are you guys the ones who killed a slave hunter named Christian?”

Pict did not answer. Sungchul searched the floor while stomping on the venomous insects until he found the most suitable one. It was the stink bug that lays eggs in human flesh.

Sungchul grabbed the stink bug and held it over Mayra's body until it laid its eggs. Mayra's body resisted weakly, but Sungchul only continued to look at Pict. Pict realised that the man had no intentions of showing mercy.

At that moment, a miracle occurred. Mayra, who looked as though she had lost consciousness, suddenly opened her eyes.

“Pict! I'll be going first.”

Mayra's bloodied eyes shook violently before it rolled over; revealing only the whites of her eyes. Sungchul confirmed her death with indifferent eyes. Pict found renewed confidence at his sister's exemplary death and glared at Sungchul with hate-filled eyes once again.

‘Try whatever interrogation you want. I'll take it all with the name of the Almeira family at stake!’

However, Sungchul only looked indifferent. He let Mayra's corpse fall to the floor and squatted down to start some kind of procedure. The stench of blood began to flood the room. Sungchul held Mayra's corpse and walked out of the storage room. Both his hands held Mayra's corpse that hadn't even cooled yet. Soon, something unbelievable occurred.

“Aaaaa.”

Mayra's corpse began to cry out. It was something unintelligible, but it had Mayra's distinct sound. Sungchul held the corpse and looked puzzled before muttering to himself.

“It's not working so well since I hadn't done it in so long.”

He lifted the corpse and began to manipulate it to his whim.

“Aaaaah!!!”

Mayra's jaw flew open and let out a terrifying shriek. Much more strongly. Pict, who was watching the scene, knew the monster's intentions.

‘That bastard... he's calling them. He's calling my family...!’

Pict began to thrash about wildly to draw Sungchul's attention to himself, and when his eyes finally met Sungchul's, he nodded

vigorously.

“That’s right. I killed that slave hunter. We done now? You happy?”

Sungchul only continued to look at him indifferently and shook his head.

“I’m just getting started.”

Chapter 52 – The Hunt (2)

On a tall throne, there sat a man wearing a golden suit of armour. He looked to be in his early-30s by appearance with his thick blonde hair and faded blue eyes, exuding a powerful spirit. William Quintin Marlboro. People of this world referred to him as the Emperor of the Human Empire.

He received a report that a seemingly insignificant man sought an audience with him who was the leader of the most powerful nation in the Other World. The Emperor wasn't pleased with it, but he did feel curious. He commanded the man be brought to his throne.

A middle-aged man with a naive look about him was brought 100 paces before the throne and made to kneel. The Royal guards received some item from the man and presented it cordially to the Emperor. The item was wrapped in a silk cloth.

When he unraveled the cloth, he found that it contained a single sword made of ivory.

“Mmm.”

A low rumble escaped from the Emperor's mouth. The scene 25 years ago, when he completed the Summoning Palace and entered the Golden City, appeared before his eyes.

“Allow him within 50 paces.”

The middle-aged man hurriedly stepped forward and bowed down before the line marked bright red. The Emperor finally asked his question.

“Who gave you the sword?”

The middle-aged man readily answered his question.

“The E-Enemy of the world, your Majesty The Emperor.”

The middle-aged man spoke his account of the events without reservation. A faint smile formed on William’s lips.

‘You’ve finally shown yourself. Sungchul.’

He rose from his throne and looked at his surroundings.

“Which of our military unit is closest to the Golden City?”

An armored man answered from a distance with a bow.

“It is the 2nd Armada lead by our retainer Dimitri Medioff.”

“Mmm, the 2nd Armada.”

The Emperor stroked his beard as he fell into thought, then gestured with his arm before making his command.

“Send the 2nd Armada to the Golden City. Their objective is the Demolisher, Sungchul Kim. Eliminate him regardless of casualties.”

When the Emperor’s words were spoken, the military commanders quickly began to move. Magicians wearing white uniforms used the stone of telepathy to make communications, and the Flying Dragon Platoon rose their wyverns into formation towards the north. As the entire Empire stirred awake, the Emperor gazed towards the distant north with his faded blue eyes in deep thought.

‘It’s been eight years already.’

Eight years ago. The most influential existences within the continent were gathered to halt the upcoming Calamity. They were named the 13 Champions of the Continent. Currently the title exists only as a type of formality, but in the past, it used to be a gathering of all the denizens of the other world who were believed to be the only ones capable of saving it from the calamity. Unexpectedly, they betrayed that grand expectation in a spectacular way. Only a single voice shouted in rebellion against them, but no one was listening. That man soon took on the moniker of the Enemy of the World.

“Sungchul... why have you returned?”

A question rose in the Emperor's eyes.

—

Within a dark basement, Altugius was tied in the centre like a piece of meat ready to be butchered.

Thwak!

A whip with sharp hooks tore away the flesh of his back.

“Uggggh!”

Altugius felt his sight turn yellow as he let out a painful scream, but the torturer had no such mercy. They proceeded to flog him every 10 seconds without delay. Altugius' back looked pitifully ragged, caked with dried blood and his consciousness was hanging by a thread. The Inquisitor of Heresy, Maxima, appeared as he was drawing his final few breaths.

“Bestow the grace of the God of Order upon this man.”

The servants wearing crow masks used restoration magic on Altugius' body. The wounds on his split back became sealed, the pain receded, and the light behind his eyes returned. As some of his consciousness returned to him, he recognised the man standing before him and let out a shout.

“How... How could you do this to me...?!”

The Inquisitor of Heresy held up a hand, and then the torturer struck Altugius' abdomen with the hard shaft of the whip. It felt as though it would pierce his gut.

“Kwuk!”

Altugius spat out a glob of dark blood. The aggravating noise of clanging metal chains echoed in the small room. When some semblance of silence returned again, the Inquisitor of Heresy spoke softly.

“Xero Altugius. You have bravely fought for the revival of Airfruit until now.”

“T-then why do this to me...?!”

Altugius gathered a series of shallow breaths to speak. The Inquisitor raised his hand in response, making the people within the torture room rush out like the tide. When they were left alone, the Inquisitor put his hands behind his back and began to circle Altugius slowly.

“The situation has become severely worse, Altugius. Did you know that the Enemy of the World has been spotted here?”

“The E-Enemy of the W-world...?!”

“Whenever the Enemy of the World appears, the most powerful within the continent will be advised to send their forces. It means that the Crusaders of the New World will be formed. I have an obligation to finish things here before those people arrive. In other words, there is now a need to pick up the pace.”

“What does that have to do with me? Why do I have to be in this state?”

Altugius shook his chained arms. On the other end, the Inquisitor didn't show even the smallest of movements; like an object in a painting. A small voice muttering beneath his mask rang out.

“It is quite unfortunate, but I have decided to put you up for execution. I have concluded that it is the only way to clean up the various problems plaguing Airfruit.”

“How is that the only solution?”

Maxima replied Altugius' question with an odd laughter.

“Kekekek...”

It was a laughter that sounded like the final gasping breath of a patient dying from a virulent disease. Altugius opened his eyes wide and looked towards the Inquisitor. Finally, he spoke.

“Soon the teaching staff under Robert Danton shall all be killed by hands of the Assassin’s Guild. That will leave you as the final pillar upholding Airfruit. What will happen then when I pluck out that final pillar?”

It was then when Altugius finally grasped the true intentions of the Inquisitor.

“You mean to get rid of Airfruit?”

The Inquisitor nodded.

“20 years ago, I was found to be mediocre by Airfruit and left the school of my own volition. I spent many sleepless nights, forced to watch a bastard son of a mistress take my rightful place and wield the powers of my birthright.”

“For such a petty reason...?!”

The Inquisitor’s body squirmed in an odd way at Altugius’ rebuke. He turned away from Altugius with strange movements akin to a wind-up doll, then slowly took off his crow mask. Altugius let out a brief scream at the sight. Beneath the mask, there was a mummified face of a corpse.

He was not dead. Hot blood flowed within his veins pumped by a still beating heart. It was intense tenacity through a nightmarish hell that turned his face into what it was. The Inquisitor put on his mask again after revealing his true face, then spoke poetically.

“My motivation may seem petty to you, but to me, it might be something important enough to stake my destiny on. Conversely, your haughty motivation might look as petty to me.”

The Inquisitor clapped, signalling the torturers and guards to enter the torture room once again. He moved past them and spoke in a low voice.

“The execution will proceed tomorrow at noon.”

Altugius did not speak again. He thought of Sarasa, who would be waiting for him alone.

‘No... I can’t die like this!’

However, the chains that bound him were all too solid. The torturers held their whips.

A flashing blade cut through the throat of a magician in the cover of darkness. The magician took a mortal wound before he could even open his eyes and scream. D’vici put a pillow on the face of the wounded mage to confirm his kill. The magician gripped the hand that held down the pillow and thrashed about wildly before it lost its strength and slid away.

This was the 5th one. D’vici had managed to wipe out the

teaching staff of the school of pyromancy in a single day. A similar series of events would be happening over in the next room. His wife from the Grimada family, Illia Almeria, released venomous scorpions to kill the head disciples of the school of Pyromancy. Dozens of people died in their sleep; completely clueless to the cause.

The couple who had finished their silent slaughter met up at the entrance to the school of Pyromancy. Two headless corpses were growing cold at the entrance. D'vici looked toward the dark sky and spoke.

“All done?”

“Yes. All done. Not a single one left.”

Illia pushed back a scorpion trying to escape her sleeve and made a sinister smile. D'vici wiped off a bloodied sword and began to think.

‘Just the school of Cryomancy is left. Pict and Myra. I hope they’re doing well.’

D'vici thought this as he looked over to his wife and spoke softly.

“Anyways, I’m not sure if Myra’s side is going well.”

“Should I go and find out?”

At Illia's question, D'vici nodded. He was a traditional Assassin with a serious and cautious personality. At the very least, he liked to avoid any risks and succeeded his tasks without any losses, but it was unexpectedly rated abysmally by his peers, and so his family was ranked the lowest among the Assassin families. Despite this, he never regretted his decisions about his methods. Illia, who knew this about her husband, pulled out a small bottle and opened it. There was a blue-winged moth inside that crawled out and wiggled in the night sky, before flying off somewhere.

The moth was called the Lovebird Moth, and it was one of the few bugs that Illia had with no venomous properties. However, it had the unique ability to seek out its mate. The male of the Lovebird moth is known to seek out its consort across any distance. The Lovebird moth released by Illia expectedly flew off rapidly in search of a companion. Finally, it found its mate inside a dark warehouse. Its mate was unfortunately squashed into an unrecognisable shape. The moth raised itself and began to fly back out into the night sky.

“....”

A figure in the darkness watched the direction in which the moth flew off to. It was Sungchul. Behind him were two corpses hanging side by side. These were the corpses of Myra and Pict.

Sungchul, who looked to be slowing down, left behind the two corpses and made a beeline towards the direction of the moth. The Lovebird moth split the night sky as it made its way to its owner, then landed on her hand. Illia's face froze.

“Honey. There is a problem.”

D’vici was not shaken.

“You’re sure?”

“Yes. It lost its mate.”

D’vici let out a shallow sigh and disappeared into the darkness.

“Let’s fall back.”

His body slowly turned into fog and melted into the night. Illia melded into that fog to hide herself. However, Illia soon discovered hostility in the air lurking nearby. She had discovered hostile rumblings in her webs cast about in the surroundings. She spoke quietly.

“Honey. It’s an enemy.”

“Is it him?”

“Most likely.”

D’vici instantly calculated the amount of power he possessed along with any other advantages that he might have.

‘Enemy of the World. His strength is estimated at 600. Dexterity and vitality are known to be about 500. His combat strategy is just one: oppressively crush with sheer stats. It is the most simple but effective strategy.’

After a quick deliberation, he knew that he currently had no chance of winning. He might be able to delay and escape if his strongest son Kaz was here, but at this rate, he would die a pointless death.

“Honey.”

D’vici hid his expression. Illia caught onto his intent and nodded before looking at her husband with tearful eyes.

“I’ll buy us some time. I should be able to hold his heels for at least 3 minutes.”

“...”

“At the very least, you must escape to find Kaz and leave this place. Tell the client that the bastard is here.”

“I understand.”

Illia kissed his cheeks a final time before disappearing into the night. This was the last farewell between the Assassin lovers.

D'vici, who was now alone, regained his original expression and waited for his oppressive enemy to arrive. Soon, a man in worn out clothing waded out of the darkness.

‘He looks different. I had heard he was a giant over 2 meters tall.’

The man who appeared in the darkness spoke.

“Are you the head of the Assassins?”

“That’s right. I am D’vici Almeida, the 32nd Head of the Almeida family.”

D’vici replied honourably, reaffirming his plans once again.

‘Three minutes. I have to hold firm with the belief that this is my final stand.’

However, before even 3 seconds had passed, D’vici knew that he was outmatched by a monster much stronger than he had ever realized. He died instantly as his skull shattered with a single blow to the head.

Sungchul watched the figure of the woman fleeing in the distance after his kill, but he didn’t pursue right away. He patiently stalked his prey until it guided him to its nest, but the prey appeared to have caught onto his plans. She led him to an odd location then

turned around.

“Kill me too. Enemy of the World.”

Illia's eyes swirling with tears and vengeance glared at him as she let loose all of her venomous insects in her possession. There were so many that it looked as though a black smoke was spewing from her sleeves.

Sungchul pulled out his beloved Fal Garaz. Illia's expression froze.

“You might be able to kill us tonight, but our family will live on!”

Sungchul swung Fal Garaz. Illia's form was swept away with her venomous insects. Sungchul watched the mixture of human and insect viscera dripping around his feet with indifference then stared off into the night sky.

‘Was she talking about that guy from before?’

He already knew the face of the last surviving member of their clan, as well as the client who had hired them. That was enough. That day the entirety of the Almeida family that had spread fear through the continent had been killed except the eldest son.

In that same moment, those wearing crow masks were raising a pyre at the entrance of Airfruit Academy.

Chapter 53 – Primordial Light (1)

At the break of dawn, Airfruit became a place of horrors. The teaching staff of pyromancy that had been leading the corrupted school had been slaughtered, and their promising students had all met their deaths. Those who were still around gathered in disparate groups and wandered the campus seeking the assassins with tensed nerves and a torch in hand, while the rest lined up the corpses and mourned the dead. Sungchul arrived here at this time.

A group of students holding torches stood in his path. It was because of his unusual appearance.

“Who are you? Identify yourself!”

A man shouted bravely. Five staves were trained in Sungchul’s direction. Sungchul glared at them and spoke curtly.

“I am a student here.”

At this point, one of the students recognised him.

“Wait, this man. I’ve seen him before. Put away the staves.”

It was a student wearing a robe dyed in blue. He asked for discretion from his fellow students, then approached Sungchul to speak to him discreetly.

“You are the fellow from the School of Alchemy, right? I greet you. I am a junior at the School of Cryomancy named Sidone. It is truly a blessing for you to have survived this fearful night.”

It was apparent that the man wished to become an acquaintance of Sungchul. When Sungchul remained silent, he offered to lead the way to Professor Danton.

“Did he also survive?”

Sungchul didn't know of all the casualties yet. He knew that the Almeida family had been behind the attack on the school, but he had no way to know where their blades had been directed. Sidone briefly spoke of the known casualties so far.

“For now, it isn't an exaggeration to say that the school of Pyromancy has been completely obliterated. The teaching staff has been wiped out. There are plenty of rumours, but I think that the Assassin's guild might be behind this attack.”

The school of Cryomancy suffered almost no casualties according to the man's report. It could be because Sungchul intervened before the Almeida family could fully commit themselves to the assault on the said school. He decided to wait until later to consider this a blessing or a curse. Meanwhile, he took up Sidone's offer to be guided toward the school of Cryomancy, which was believed to be the most secure building on campus.

“You were quite fortunate to be able to survive this horrid night unscathed.”

Robert greeted Sungchul warmly, and he nodded in response. Sungchul then spoke of everything he saw at the entrance.

“It looks as though the Order of Purity will burn Professor Altugius on the pyre.”

But for some reason, Robert looked unfazed at the fate of his fellow professor.

“Whether that stubborn old fool dies or not is none of our concern. The most important news is that the Assassin’s Guild has attacked us. In other words, the Inquisitor of Heresy has drawn his blade.”

He didn’t hide his anger. His eyes burned with vigour and a twisted smile formed on his lips.

“If the Inquisitor wants to play like that, we also have our ways.”

“Our ways?”

Robert let out a carefree laughter and nodded his head.

“Our way to retaliate that is.”

All Robert had was a handful of mages beneath him. Furthermore, the majority of the fighting force other than Robert

and the teaching staff were students. It looked as though cleaning up the mob soldiers of the Order of Purity might be their limit.

“Follow me, my friend protected by the Ancient Kingdom. I will reveal to you our secret weapon.”

He brought Sungchul and a small number of guards down to a basement. Robert swung his staff at a wall of the basement where musky air flowed, and then the aged bricks began shifting to reveal a secret passageway. Sungchul recognised that the passageway looked relatively new compared to the rest of the architecture.

“Only a few know the truth that our Headmaster the Grand Magnus was a Follower of Calamity.”

Robert watched a few gutter rats become spooked and scurry away before he spoke again.

“However, most people with a similar status to me should have suspected it. It was challenging to find any magician who dissented against the Great Magician Balzark when he was recruiting for the Followers of Calamity.”

“Is that so?”

“It was even worse among the higher ranked magicians since they had already hit a plateau. They needed some way to break through their limitations, something to stimulate their growth. Like...”

Unlike the passage covered in darkness, they reached an area filled with light. They could see nothing but the vague mass of light in the distance, and as soon as Sungchul stepped into this area, he could see it right away. A massive cave and a spherical structure stood in the centre.

“Like this!”

Robert said with pride in his voice, and Sungchu’s eyes lit up.

‘It’s a dimensional door.’

Large forces such as the Human Empire and the Ancient Kingdom had set up massive dimensional doors to move their large military forces. It wasn’t immediately clear why a dimensional door was needed at a magic academy, but Robert quickly provided an explanation.

“This dimensional door is connected to the Demonic Realm.”

“Ho?”

“The former Headmaster had completed most of it, but it lacked a few critical components. With the funds that you provided, I was finally able to complete the dimensional door.”

Robert spoke with an excited voice. Sungchul looked back toward

the dimensional door and then at Robert with a cold gaze.

“What’s the grand plan?”

Robert let out another carefree laughter and pointed towards the dimensional door.

“At high noon today, Altugius will be executed according to the notice put out by the Inquisitor of Heresy. Much of the Inquisitor’s force will be gathered there as well. That is when I will utilise the dimensional gate.”

Robert flicked his finger which caused a plume of ice to form in the air then shatter as it fell.

“After that, they’ll become like this. All due to the unexpected visit of the forces of the Devil in the Golden City.”

Robert’s heroic laughter echoed within the large cave while Sungchul only gazed at the spectacle quietly.

“This dimensional gate. How will you activate it?”

The underground prison of the Inquisitor of Heresy was not a place just anyone could enter. They had to satisfy one of two requirements: they had to be sentenced by the Inquisitor of Heresy, or they had to provide enough bribes to satisfy the

wardens. Sungchul entered the dimly-lit underground prison through the latter method.

“Be quick. You have until the Inquisitor finishes his midnight prayer.”

The warden with the crow mask tactfully retreated. Sungchul flung open the unlocked door and stepped into the torture chamber. Within the center of the chamber, there was an unconscious man whose body showed apparent signs of torture while being held in chains.

“....”

Sungchul approached him. Altugius regained a bit of consciousness and put in some effort to open his swollen eyes. His eyes, peering through a hairline gap, was filled with fear. His stubborn spirit had been drained out of him during the span of the torture. Sungchul, who had seen his powerful personality when the man had fought against Kaz and when he had chased away Leonard, felt a bit of pity towards his current transformation.

“It is your disciple.”

Sungchul revealed his identity before Altugius could get a good look at him. Altugius’ body shook ever so slightly.

“S-Sungchul Kim? Are you actually here?”

When Sungchul nodded, Altugius desperately rushed to speak.

“W-water. I need some water...”

Sungchul looked around his surroundings. There was some water in a few barrels, but it was tainted with blood and filth. Sungchul opened his Soul Storage to pull out a transparent bottle that blended with the surroundings and brought it to Altugius’ lips.

When a single drop of liquid from the container touched his tongue, Altugius’ eyes flew open. A miraculously refreshing sensation travelled from the tip of his tongue to the rest of his body. Sungchul drained the contents of the bottle completely into his mouth.

“What a remarkable flavor of water. T-Thank you! I feel as though my vigour is returning!”

Altugius would never know the truth even in his dreams. What Sungchul had given him was the sap of the World Tree grown in the land of Fairies.

“Ok then. Why have you come here?”

After regaining his senses Altugius looked towards Sungchul and asked in a low voice, so Sungchul let known his intentions.

“I came here to learn the Secrets of Cosmomancy.”

A sigh escaped Altugius' mouth.

“What a waste. I don't have it with me at the moment.”

“Then?”

“The Secret lies in the place that I've spent my life guarding. The Observatory of the school of Cosmomancy.”

“The Observatory of the school of Cosmomancy?”

“If I weren't a prisoner, I would follow your side to deliver you the Secret... but as of now, it is not so easy.”

“I shall break you out then.”

Altugius simply shook his head weakly.

“I would keep my life if I escaped, but I will not be able to deliver you the Secret of Cosmomancy. It takes a considerable amount of time to inherit the Secret of Cosmomancy, and Maxima Magnus will not stand by once he hears of my escape.”

“You are quite honest.”

Other magicians would have begged and pleaded for freedom,

regardless of their actual intentions to keep any promises made. It was the modus operandi of magicians which Sungchul had to ceaselessly deal with. Following what Sungchul said, Altugius obtusely asked as he looked wide-eyed.

“Why bother lying about something soon to be discovered anyway?”

A faint smile formed on Sungchul’s lips.

“I only said so because there never seems to be an end of people willing to make those short-lived lies.”

Altugius too broke into a smile, but it was soon replaced with an expression of deep concern.

“Can I ask a single favour from you?”

“You’re speaking of your granddaughter?”

“That’s correct. Please take care of Sarasa for me. I don’t mean forever, but her father lives along the frontier borders of the Demonic Realm. Far north.”

“Sarasa’s father?”

“He should be active as a mercenary mage at the ‘Storm Battlefront’ under the alias ‘Deckard’. He’s a man-child constantly

busying himself in the harsh Demonic Realm trying to save the world. Please lead Sarasa to that man. It won't be the Secret of Cosmomancy, but he shall provide an adequate reward in return."

"..."

Sungchul lowered his head as though in thought.

"Time is up. It is about time for the midnight prayer to end."

The annoyed voice of the warden rang out in the distance. Sungchul raised his head once again, then looked towards Altugius.

"I am sorry, but I will have to learn the Secret of Cosmomancy."

Altugius' face was filled with horror.

"But at this moment...!"

"I will be back. At a more appropriate time."

Leaving behind these ambiguous words, Sungchul left the dimly-lit torture chamber. Altugius looked towards the backside of Sungchul with a complicated gaze mixed with terror and anticipation.

‘Just... who is that man?’

He could already figure out that the man was not ordinary, but his limited knowledge could not even guess at what his identity might be. The individual named Sungchul Kim was such a man.

Sarasa was looking at her face in the mirror. One-half retained the beauty of her life, while the other had the grotesque form of a mummified corpse. However, Sarasa did not despair or falter. She calmly asked the man who was facing away from her.

“You want me to begin packing?”

Sungchul nodded.

“By noon today, you and your grandfather will be escaping this place together.”

“Will that be possible with your strength? I will do all I can to help.”

The eyes on the decayed half revealed a sharp gaze. However, Sungchul shook his head.

“I only need you to pack for now.”

“Do you really think of me as being so weak?”

Sarasa let out a laugh.

At this point, he quietly took out his beloved weapon. Fal Garaz. The most powerful hammer forged by the Dwarven gods caused the air surrounding it to destabilize and tremble in its sheer presence.

Sarasa who saw the weapon was filled with terror.

“Is that... Fal... Garaz?”

There was a single incident that shook the other world before her death. It was the earth-shattering news that a devilish man known as the Enemy of the World broke into the temple of the Dwarves and stole their holy weapon. She had only heard of the name then and learned of its origins and appearance by researching it within the library. The holy weapon that she had seen only through books had graced her with its appearance. The awe and danger she felt now were incomparable to what could be felt through illustrations.

The man holding the weapon finally opened his mouth to speak.

“I am Sungchul Kim.”

It was neither an alias nor just a man with the same name. He was literally the former member of the ‘13 champions of the continent’. The man who is now better known as ‘Enemy of the

World’

“I... I can’t believe it... Why would... that Sungchul come to us...?”

“I have sworn by my name to rescue you and your grandfather.”

Sarasa gripped her fists tight. What was there to say if none other than the most dangerous man in the world had promised to protect you?

“Kyu Kyu!”

As though it understood Sarasa’s torrent of emotions, the Sky Squirrel within her grasp began to bother her for kibbles. Sarasa stole a peek at her sleeves out of the corner of her eyes and petted the Sky Squirrel’s head.

Chapter 54 – Primordial Light (2)

Kaz looked over the corpses of his family members in disbelief. Everything happened in a single night. His brother, sister, and parents had all met their untimely demise without discretion.

“Are these the corpses of your family members?”

A man wearing a shiny golden helmet asked matter-of-factly. The ones that gathered the bodies were the wyvern knights of the Human Empire that had been dispatched to the Golden City last night. They swiftly dispersed within the entirety of the Golden City to seek out any traces of the most dangerous man which led them to find the unsightly form of the four corpses.

“They are my family’s remains.”

Kaz gritted his teeth as he spoke, then looked around his surroundings before speaking again.

“Where is this Enemy of the World? Where did that bastard go?”

“The forward team is tracking the Enemy of the World. You don’t have to concern yourself with that. The air fleet led by Retainer Medioff will arrive here soon. When the military might of the air fleet is on full display, there will be nowhere for the Enemy of the World to escape to.”

“....”

Kaz nibbled on his nails as he held his silence. He felt as though his anger would explode out of his chest, but the cold calculations of an assassin led him to believe in the Wyvern Knight's words.

“On a subject besides the Enemy of the World, the Inquisitor of Heresy from the Order of Purity sent notice that a Purification will occur today at the Airfruit Magic Academy. If there is any indication that the Enemy of the World has joined hands with the Heretics of Airfruit, it may be that he'll show his face at that location.”

The Wyvern Knight fixed his helmet then hopped onto the large Wyvern waiting for him.

“Kweeeeh!!”

The wyvern rose up into the sky with an earsplitting cry as it flapped its massive wings. The air current formed by its wings caused Kaz's hair and clothes to thrash about wildly.

“....”

Kaz, who stood alone now, gave a silent prayer to his family's remains then left the scene.

‘Sungchul Kim. You will die by my hands.’

His eyes flashed with killing intent denser than ever before.

When the sun reached its peak, those that wore shining armour gathered in front of Airfruit Academy. A pyre with wood stacked high sat beside an aged tree decorated with dangling corpses with rotting flesh. The Inquisitor of Heresy, who was still wearing his crow mask, arrived in a carriage with a solemn atmosphere about him. A bloodied old man with his hands tied behind him rode on a donkey which followed the carriage.

The executioner pulled the man off the donkey and tied him onto the pyre while cuffs that interfered with magic activation were strapped on the old man's wrists. A priest in a crow mask appeared in front of the restrained old man on the pyre holding a long scroll, then listed his sins one by one.

“Sinner Altugius Xero, despite his responsibilities as a professor of a Magic Academy and a guardian of knowledge, could not overcome the temptations of corruptive knowledge and have fallen to become a member of the Followers of Calamity. For the countless crimes that he had committed and the greatest crime of murdering his friend and superior, the Grand Magnus...”

Altugius shut his eyes and did not rebuke a single charge. Trying to reason now was an effort in futility, and shouting and begging would only serve to further humiliate himself. He wanted an honourable death as a student and educator of the hallowed Airfruit Academy, but the puppet in the crow mask continued listing false crimes while smearing his image. He no longer cared for anything. Still, he had but a single regret.

He sought out through the crowd of countless people in the plaza for a single face through cracked eyes.

‘Sarasa.’

He couldn’t find his precious granddaughter who was the apple of his eyes. It could have been that she alone hadn’t heard the news from the House of Recollections or the man named Sungchul took her away from here.

“...for this, Altugius Xero has been charged for judgment by the Purifying Fire.”

The announcement of his execution, which he had ignored for a brief moment, rang out clearly in his ears. Altugius let out a dull sigh before gazing out towards the people staring at him.

They were students wearing robes of various colours, professors of unpopular schools, and faces that he had met once or twice without knowing their names. He discovered anew that their faces were drained of energy with shadows of depressive dread looming over them. It might be due to endless years of deterioration wearing down on him or out of the literal fear of imminent doom, but he didn’t like it. The school he had protected his whole life was far more honorable, worthy, and proud than any other.

Altugius’ mouth, which had been tightly shut during this whole time, opened shortly after his execution had been announced.

“Why are you looking at me with rotten eyes like some dead fish?!”

Altugius suddenly shouted. It was a booming voice that couldn't have come from a dying old man.

“Even if I die or the scraps of the Followers of the Cult die, Airfruit will remain. Are you all not the proud educators and pupils of the proud school of Airfruit? Even if the doors to Great Magic are closed to us, Airfruit will live on as long as even a single person etches the name Airfruit into his heart. It will live on!”

Altugius agitated the shame within the survivors. Their ashamed faces looked towards the floor and let out a sigh. Altugius turned his head and took his seat at the corner of his execution ground, then glared at the Inquisitor of Heresy.

The Inquisitor didn't react as usual, but Altugius smiled toward such a man and soundlessly mouthed a message.

“Talentless Bastard.”

No sound could be heard, but the message was deciphered clearly by the Inquisitor. His hand rose.

A massive formation of magic appeared at that moment.

“Look at that! It is the Air fleet!”

“It’s the flag of the Human Empire! The Air Fleet of the Human Empire has arrived!”

Following a ship resembling a massive plate, a total of 6 ships appeared above the Golden City airspace from the Dimensional Door. It was the appearance of the oppressive Airship Fleet that represented the might of the Human Empire.

Dimitri Medioff, a powerful man within the Human Empire, was looking at the distant ground below with a scornful gaze within the flagship, Bengard.

“The Enemy of the World appeared here? He’s got balls. Why couldn’t he just continue to linger around the Demonic Realm? How dare he show his face this deep into the continent!”

He swung his baton as he barked his orders.

“Disperse the ground forces to seal this city!”

At the same moment, a particular man was looking over the scene from Robert Danton’s study with aloof eyes. The man was Sungchul. He quickly ran to the secret passageway, and then he stopped to gaze up at the Dimensional Gate which stood at the center of a large cavern hidden underneath the academy.

Several corpses were lying about with eyes wide open around the

Dimensional Door's activation device. Sungchul approached Robert's corpse at the centre of the many corpses and tore away the necklace around his neck.

It was the key to the activation of the Dimensional Door.

The slabs of stones surrounding the Dimensional Door rotated slowly as soon as the amethyst key was entered. The rotation of the stones grew increasingly rapid until it caused a crack in the space at the centre of the Dimensional Door.

“Uuu... are you really going through with it?”

Bertelgia asked from his pocket. Sungchul nodded as he looked over at the Dimensional Door.

“It's to reduce casualties as much as possible. The Demons are easier to fight against than me.”

Sungchul saw a familiar earthen flame beyond the crack.

“Krrrrrrrr!”

At the same time, he could also hear the cries of beasts in the distance.

“....”

Sungchul left the cave while leaving the Dimensional Door activated.

The execution was about to proceed. The man wearing the crow mask was pouring oil over the wood, and the executor with a torch was waiting for his moment. The Inquisitor of Heresy held up his hand as all the preparations were finished, and the moment he lowered his hands, the pyre below Altugius would light ablaze.

The Inquisitor's hand soon fell.

The torch fell onto the wood below, and it began to burn with dark smoke pouring into the air. Altugius shut both his eyes and prepared himself for death, but at that moment, a powerful gust of wind blew onto the execution ground with enough force to blow away Altugius' beard, if not also his skin. The fire that had been growing with vigour disappeared without a trace, and the execution ground fell silent. One of the students gathered the courage to look over in the direction of the wind.

“T-that man is?!”

One of the Alchemy students pointed out a finger at the man in question. The man who wore a tattered field jacket with shabby jeans was a famous figure within the school of Alchemy. However, he was holding an item that hadn't been seen on him before. It was a beautiful and extraordinary hammer with a lengthy shaft.

“Who is it?!”

The Inquisitor of Heresy roared in anger.

Sungchul suddenly moved. His movements weren't fast or slow, but it exuded heavy pressure that didn't allow just anyone to stand in its way. The soldiers of the Inquisitor wearing glamorous armour hesitated, making the sergeants and the commissioned officers bark their orders at them.

“What are you waiting for? Stop that man!”

With the command, the soldiers pulled out their short swords and stood before Sungchul.

Slam!

A dull sound filled the execution ground. The people could see the dozens of soldiers flying into the air. These dozens were blown away by a single blow of the hammer. Sungchul pushed past the soldiers as if it was as easy as sweeping a dusty floor. One of the spectators recalled something and shouted at the top of his lungs.

“T-That is the Enemy of the World!”

Terror filled everyone by that single phrase. Soldiers no longer moved despite the commands from their superior officers, the spectators began stepping back, and the state workers started to struggle to leap from the platform. Only a single man, the Inquisitor of Heresy, stood before Sungchul.

“Who dares disrupt the holy procession of the God of Order!”

Sungchul’s only reply was a single blow from his hammer.

Wham!

The Inquisitor’s upper body was crushed and embedded into the ground, but the Inquisitor of Heresy was a man blessed by the God of Order. He was the embodiment of holy strength. His broken form was reborn to its original shape under a blinding light. The soldiers of the Order of Purity watched the holy scene with tears in their eyes.

“Oh! Look and see! The Inquisitor of Heresy, Maxima Magnus, has received the blessing of God!”

However, resurrection did not resolve the root of the problem. Sungchul fixed the issue of Maxima’s resurrection with a very simple method.

Slam! Slam! Slam!

It was to whack away at him until he died. The final thing that Maxima witnessed was an irrational hammering and a similarly irrational strength behind it. Maxima continued to resurrect until the seventh time, upon which he died flat as a pancake.

‘Inquisitors of Heresy are definitely cockroaches.’

Sungchul who had killed the Inquisitor headed towards Altugius who had been restrained to the execution grounds. No one dared to stand in his way.

Altugius looked at Sungchul with shock in his eyes.

“A-are you the Enemy of the World?”

Sungchul nodded, then spoke bluntly.

“But why does that matter?”

It was a simple sentence. Altugius was taken aback by the excessively haughty phrase, yet simply smiled. However, the danger had not yet passed.

The ground troops of the Human Empire swarmed to the execution grounds by teleportation and by foot.

“There! The Enemy of the World!”

“Engage with all forces to stop him!”

Elite fighters and mages numbering in the hundreds gathered with Sungchul in their sights. Altugius looked at them, coughed and then spoke.

“Shit. Leave me and go. You should at least be able to save my granddaughter, right? Isn’t that so?”

Sungchul freed Altugius from his restraints, then spoke in a firm voice.

“No one can stop me from doing what I intend to do.”

As soon as the final word escaped his lips, a blood-curdling scream pierced high into the sky and a black mass rose into the air like a cloud of locusts. They were the invasion forces of the Demonic Realm summoned through the Dimensional Door.

The soldiers of the Air Fleet that surrounded Sungchul with glee fell back into a defensive position and began to shout.

“It is the Demons! The Demons are here! Raise the alarm!”

A hurried sound of bells rang into the air causing Airfruit to descend into chaos. Sungchul took that opportunity to grab Altugius and disappeared in the madness.

“The Enemy of the World! You shall not escape!”

There was one who followed after them. It was the orphaned Kaz. He had taken on mist form, a technique passed down within his family to transform into a fog, to stalk Sungchul. However,

transforming into fog did not make him immune to Sungchul's attacks. Sungchul lightly swung Fal Garaz, splitting the fog, and it did not reform again. The fog soon took a human shape and fell onto the floor.

Sungchul who had rid himself of all the pests now fled towards the Observatory of the school of Cosmomancy with Altugius. It was time for Altugius to keep his promise.

“I will not judge you for who you are. I would have helped you even if you were the Devil himself as the only one that extended a hand of salvation was you alone.”

Altugius spoke the words in a simple manner before removing the magic suppressing cuffs. As he felt the power of magic flowing back into him, he pointed towards the roof of the observatory.

“Glare.”

The beam of light shot from his extended finger easily tore away the plaster on the roof. Dust fell onto the floor, and in the midst of the rain of dust, Sungchul could see the glittering constellations beneath the plaster.

“That is the Secret passed down within the school of Cosmomancy.”

Altugius displayed his Glare once again. The beam of light which was fired from his hands accurately hit a gem arranged into a

constellation, covering the entire constellation in a bright light. Once it received enough light, it fired a beam of light into another gem in another constellation.

From scorpion to unicorn, to clam; once all 12 of the constellations were lit, Sungchul was gripped by a strange feeling as if a secret he could never come to comprehend was revealing itself to him.

[Primordial Light]

The true Secret of Cosmomancy was now in his grasp.

Chapter 55 – Primordial Light (3)

“Don’t put your guard down now. The real challenge has yet to begin.” Altugius gave a warning.

Sungchul would soon know the meaning behind his words. A tidal wave of overwhelmingly massive knowledge descended onto his consciousness. Within his mind, he experienced being different existences.

First, he was a comet existing within the infinite void of space. He felt fearful of the unending journey, trapped in frozen isolation that was colder than ice, and when the scenery changed, he was but a rock within the unnamed comet. Time went by very quickly for the rock. The sun and the moon spun past like the hands of a clock, and he saw the unceasing rotation of light and darkness.

Everything changed once the scenery suddenly collapsed around him, but the flow of time didn’t change. Various experiences of a similar nature continued. The one thing that he would never forget within all of the countless yet equally memorable worlds of wondrous fantasy was the existence of the giant sun.

Abruptly, he stood facing the exploding sun. It looked like the sun at a glance yet similar to other stars. It looked ablaze in a golden flame, but once the bias that clouded his judgement faded away, he saw that the fiery light now appeared blue and it seemed to cover the surface in pure white like snow.

Regardless of what colour it actually was, the most important

thing was the unending light pouring from the burning star. Just by looking upon the light composed of primordial might, Sungchul was able to sense the source of unforgettable power. Even after this experience, the various knowledge continued to invoke different hallucinations to project different experiences, but Sungchul could never forget that infinite light. That primordial light.

“...”

Sungchul let out a shallow sigh as his eyes flew open. He now stood in reality as the torrent of various knowledge that had flooded his mind faded away.

“Have you seen the light?”

Altugius looked at him softly as he guarded Sungchul’s side. Sungchul nodded in response.

“What light was it?”

“A very bright light.”

“What did you experience there?”

“Oppressive strength that could burn everything away.”

Altugius smiled faintly at Sungchul’s responses.

“They say that the light changes based on the observer’s perception. The light I saw was wisdom itself, but that is not what matters to you.”

Altugius pointed a finger to the air as he chanted a spell with several magic formations in the air. The 12 Constellations in the Observatory dimmed and within the light came out a single tome. Altugius slowly guided the tome down with his staff and handed it to Sungchul.

“Take it.”

“This is...?”

“Primordial Light. It is the Secret of Airfruit’s school of Cosmomancy that you have sorely sought.”

“Thank you.”

Sungchul graciously received the tome. A message in bright letters appeared before him.

[Primordial Light]

Rank: Legend

Type: Magic Book

Effect: Acquisition of Primordial Light (Cosmomancy)

Note: The light that you saw contains everything you

imagined and more.

Restriction: 500 Intuition

Requirement: Stand before the Light

The Secret of Cosmomancy was not at a level he could simply access.

“To gain a glimpse into the book, it requires two things. One is the ever-present requirement for intuition: 500 intuition in total.”

It was a fearsome number. A stat requirement worthy of the Secret of Cosmomancy.

“Is it a seventh circle magic?”

Sungchul’s eyes lit up brightly as he asked.

“You know well. As expected of the Enemy of the World.”

“What’s the other requirement?”

“You’ve already met it. Haven’t you seen the light?”

Altugius spoke as such as he turned his concern beyond the window. There was the sound of war in the distance. The sound of demonic drums. The magical bombardment of the Air Fleet. The

battle cry of humans and the roar of demons. Sungchul also noticed that the light peering in from the window was turning a red tint. The sun was beginning to set.

What appeared to be a brief experience consumed quite a bit of time as Altugius had warned.

“My part in this is complete. All that is left is up to you.”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it. Anyways, where is Sarasa? I had only heard that she is in a safe location.”

“She is already on the outskirts of the city. I have led her there personally.”

Sungchul pulled out his beloved Fal Garaz and led the way. Altugius followed behind and broke out into laughter.

“I guessed it might be possible, but for you to actually be the Enemy of the World. I thought you were a rare sort, but I would never have imagined you were someone so great.”

“I am nothing special.”

Sungchul said as he flung open the doors of the school of Cosmomancy.

When the doors flung open, the chaos that was the campus of Airfruit unfolded before their eyes. The Demonfolk covered the sky and the fleet of the Human Empire that opposed them met in a fated battle to the end.

“Kyiiii!!”

Sharp talons of a monstrous flock swooped down towards Sungchul and Altugius.

Wham!

The monsters turned into a bloody paste and dropped to the ground in a fine mist when Sungchul swung his hammer. A single one survived to fly off into the sky once again. However, the monster did not realise that there were two unwelcome riders on his back: Altugius and Sungchul.

“Hold on tight.”

Sungchul tightened his grip on the monster’s neck and turned to the side.

“Kyyiiii!”

The creature let out a pained cry as he turned toward the direction directed by Sungchul. He continued to freely control the

creature with his grip tightly on its neck. Altugius watched the scene with wide eyes and asked.

“Just when did you learn this?”

“If you hang around the Demon realm long enough, you just pick up a few things.”

At that moment, a squad of Wyvern Knight flew past the monster from the other end. A man with a golden helmet turned to the side to see Sungchul and Altugius with eyes dyed in shock, but they could not chase after the monster. One of the demonfolk had broken into a warship of the Air Fleet and was engaging in close-quarter combat. Capturing the Enemy of the World was their mission, but the military had a standing order which preceded any other order; ensuring the survival of the fleet.

“Shit! There is no end to them. What is the scale of the Dimensional door to allow so many Demonfolk to pass through?!”

It was enough to have the Fleet Commander of the Second Armada of the Human Empire, Dimitri Medioff, foaming at the mouth. The Enemy of the World that he had been hunting for had appeared, yet he had to deal with the demonfolk that had gathered like flies. It would be simple enough to deal with ordinary demons, but it looked as though their opponents were a seasoned force that had been prepared for a while.

The sheer quality and quantity of the enemy forces were difficult for the common soldier to deal with. They were managing to fight

to a standstill because they were the seasoned Air Fleet of the Human Empire.

“Kekekekek! Are you the leader?!”

A Balrog with a bulky frame stood on the deck of the warship. Dimitri Medioff pulled out his Rapier and stood against the demon while grinding his teeth.

“Shit! Quickly send out the ground forces and demolish the dimensional gate! Do it before they bring in more personnel!”

The Balrog’s axe flew toward him. Dimitri parried the massive axe blade and let loose a powerful battle roar.

As the battle continued to devolve into greater chaos, the monster carrying Sungchul and Altugius landed on the outskirts of the city. Sungchul had broken its neck to force it to crash land to be more correct.

Sungchul and Altugius put the corpse of the monster with twitching wings behind them as he approached the aged shrine. A girl with a face that was partially decayed waited for them.

“Grandpa.”

It was Sarasa. Altugius lovingly looked at the girl’s grotesque face and hugged her deeply.

“You went through so much trouble.”

Tears hung on the rim of Altugius’ eyes.

“What trouble? Grandpa went through all of it.”

Sarasa firmly gripped onto her grandfather’s back.

“There isn’t much time.”

Sungchul interrupted. He had pulled out a sack filled with gold coins and gems from his Soul Storage and pushed it towards Altugius.

“All this?”

“It is my tuition.”

“That and this...”

“Don’t worry about it. It isn’t even my money.”

“Even so...”

“When you sell these coins, I suggest you erase the coin’s mint

from its surface. If you're unlucky, the assassins from the Merchant's Coalition will track you."

Sungchul moved to leave with these words. Altugius called out to him once again.

"Can I ask one thing?"

Sungchul stopped without looking back. Altugius looked at his back as he asked his question.

"Why would someone so powerful like you learn magic underneath someone like me?"

"I need magic in order to kill the Demon King Max Hethunius. That is all."

"Just for that reason... Is that all the reason why you admitted yourself into Airfruit and acted like a freshman for...?!"

Sungchul nodded.

It was ludicrous, but it was persuasive because it was coming from Sungchul. Altugius thought as such before wondering if there was anything more he could do. Soon something came into mind.

"Does your magic power and intuition match with what I saw?"

Sungchul nodded.

“Those two numbers match exactly with my current stats. Even though, I will need to train further to bring down Max.”

“If that’s the case, seek out my son on the Demon Realm battlefield.”

“Your son?”

“The kid thinks he’s saving the world like you and left for the battlefield to seek out ways to improve his magic power. If it’s you, you might find your own method to grow but it might a bit faster with a bit of his knowledge to help you.”

“Deckard...”

Sungchul turned slightly. He never overlooked any method when it came to his growth.

Altugius tossed out a single book and a ring from his finger.

“It is embarrassing, but the book is my own composition. It is something I created in order to hand down in case I found a talented disciple. Also, show Deckard the ring, and he’ll at least give you a listen.”

Sungchul held the ring and Altugius’ book and gave a deep bow.

Sarasa stepped forward as though she had something to say.

“I apologise if I did anything to offend you, and I’ll return this child to you.”

There was a Sky Squirrel in her grasp.

“Kyu Kyu.”

It looked as though he had adapted to her touch enough to not reject it. Sarasa looked glum as though she hated the idea of parting from the beast.

Sungchul looked at her, then spoke calmly.

“Take good care of the squirrel.”

“Huh? You’re not taking it?”

Sarasa asked in surprise. Sungchul nodded.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me.”

Sungchul took a deep breath then rushed forward, leaving behind a gust of wind. The powerful whirlwind left in his wake passed through Altugius and Sarasa.

“Grandpa. I don’t think the rumours are to be believed.”

Sarasa spoke quietly.

“What do you mean?”

“I heard that the Enemy of the World resents humans the most, but why is he so nice to us?”

“I’m not sure.”

Altugius felt that the meeting with him had been brief, but he had a small insight into the man named Sungchul Kim.

“It might be that the world had just pegged him wrong.”

The man called the Enemy of the World was charging toward the centre of the bloody battle between the Demons and Wyvern Knights. Thousands upon thousands of soldiers were blocking the road toward his destination, but he freely charged toward the heart of the military forces then entered the opened Dimensional Door.

“The Enemy of the World entered the Dimensional Door!”

The soldiers of the Human Empire shouted hurriedly, but no one existed who could stop him. If there was a single change, it was that no demons appeared after the moment Sungchul had entered

the Dimensional Portal

“...come.”

Sungchul stood before the thousands of demonfolk that had set up a formation around the Dimensional Door and blocked their path. No demon dared move towards him. Soon after, Airfruit's Dimensional Door lost its strength.

The incident in the Golden City made waves throughout the entirety of the Other World. The movement of the Demons and the reappearance of the Enemy of the World. It was a headache for the powerful within the Other World. One of these powerful figures, Shamal Rajput the head of the Assassin's Guild, looked upon the disfigured body of a young assassin with cold eyes.

“Kaz Almeida. You were soundly defeated.”

Kaz had lost his entire arm from the shoulder down, leaving him in quite a pitiful state. If the blow had been any deeper, he would have been split from his neck.

“....”

He prostrated before the leader with his head bowing towards the floor. Tentacles that resembled the limbs of an octopus were attached to his stump.

“You have to continue training. You are the one who will lead the guild the moment I am defeated.”

“... I will keep it in mind.”

“Also, I will post someone to your side.”

Shamal snapped his fingers. Suddenly, a silhouette of a woman appeared in the darkness. Kaz glared at the woman in surprise.

‘Who is it? This bitch. There was no one like this among the inheritors of the four families.’

Shamal’s next words cleared up his confusion.

“She is a reincarnate.”

“A reincarnate...?!”

“That’s right. She is a reincarnate from a future that is most likely to occur. She is still quite lacking, but with enough effort, she is someone who will do great work for us.”

Shamal gestured with his hand for her to stand before Kaz. She stood before Kaz with a hooded face then spoke with an elegant voice ill-fitting for an assassin.

“I am called Ahmuge.”

Chapter 56 – Border Of The Demon World (1)

The far northern territory of the demons, otherwise known as the Demonic Realm, resides where fire and ice coexist. The demons were inherently evil creatures that worshipped strength and sought deception as a virtue. They normally were preoccupied onto their own lands with territorial disputes, but once an undisputed champion rose amongst them, they would gather en masse and launch an organized invasion into the continent.

Max Hethnius was a true king of the demonkind born every few centuries and was chosen as a Hero of the Demonic God. He had incredible strength and wicked wit which featured him in the first prophecy of the calamities. However, it was not as though humans and the other races of the Other World were watching idly as the demons stirred.

The Order of the Iron Blood Knights, a body of powerful military might, stood steadfast at the northernmost border of the continent that contained the entrance to the Demonic Realm. Fortifications were made along these borders like a net to prevent the invasion of the demons.

The areas where the demon world and the human world met were called the Demonic Battlefront.

“....”

Sungchul now stood upon that very place. He had stepped onto the land of death, where fire and ice danced side-by-side, after

having slaughtered countless demons.

‘I just ended up back here again.’

Sungchul looked at the familiar sunset with cold eyes. The expanse of land was an eyesore filled with a desolate gloom that hung in the air. The stench of sulphur carried by the wind tickled his nose. Sungchul climbed the slope of a mountain and headed towards the human territory.

“What are you going to do now?”

Bertelgia tossed the question into the air from her place in his pocket. Sungchul walked in strides as he answered.

“After a break, I’ll go back to the Demonic Realm to fight against the devils.”

There were a lot of options, but Sungchul wanted to personally experience the magic he had obtained from Airfruit. He wanted to know how effective he was against the devils as a magician. His policy was to determine his limits and weaknesses early to properly gauge his growth.

Sungchul climbed midway to a rocky mountain facing a frozen sea. In the distance, it looked like one of the many rocky mountains, but it had blackened traces and firewood hidden underneath an ashen cloth along with several pieces of iron scraps of indeterminable purpose, indicating that someone had been here.

He began to grab some firewood along with the iron scraps lying around, as though it was his own home, to fashion himself a decent cooking pot. This place had been one of his former campsites in the past. Sungchul, who was welcomed by neither humans nor demons, had created several hideouts here and along the Demonic Battlefield to rotate and find some rest. Of course, he created his favourite dishes here too.

He approached a massive boulder blocking a cave beyond the camp. It had no sign of intrusion. Only some small bugs called the Demon Louse ran out in surprise. Sungchul took a deep breath and gripped the massive boulder with both hands. He didn't need things like handles.

Crumble!

Anywhere his fingers sunk into became handles. Sungchul waited briefly with his fingers embedded directly into the boulder until he suddenly lifted it.

“... it's not even that shocking anymore.”

Bertelgia flapped in the vicinity while staring blankly at the scene.

Thud!

The boulder blocking the cave was moved slightly to the side.

The blunt shock that had enough force to cause a slight tremor on the ground could be felt beneath Sungchul's feet. Sungchul brought out a piece of wood burning underneath the pot and used it as a torch to enter the currently opened cave. The cave was filled with various pottery made of clay; They were fermentation pots made by Sungchul's own hands.

Sungchul found a pot among several pots that had been left to the side with a large stone pressing down on top. He tossed the stone to the side and opened the container. Within the pot was a plant root about the size of a human child that had been pickled bright red. Sungchul's mouth began to water.

“T-That is the Mandragora?!”

Bertelgia, who had eventually followed into the cave, saw the mysterious plant within the pot and shouted in surprise. Sungchul nodded.

“There is no better delicacy than Kimchi made of this little guy.”

He pulled off a leaf of the pickled Mandragora kimchi and savoured the flavour in his mouth.

[The Score of this Recipe is... 12 points!]

The score was rubbish, but the taste within Sungchul's mouth

was grander than any delicacy.

“Mm”

He closed his eyes and savoured the taste for a bit while Bertelgia hurried out of the cave while muttering to herself.

“My god... to make some weird food out of that precious thing...”

Sungchul cooked some soaked rice in the cooking pot. There was no need for any other side dish. He emptied a bowl of rice while eating some pickled Mandragora with the scenery of the Demonic Realm before him.

After eating his fill, he sat on a flat piece of rock and closed his eyes. The sulphur-infused breeze that flowed through the Demonic Realm lightly brushed his hair. He opened his eyes after his bit of rest and rose from his seat. He began heading toward the Demonic realm.

Demons blocked his path as he approached the corridor connected to the Demonic realm.

They were a lower species known as imps that looked like hairless monkeys, and all they had in their thick skulls were gluttony and evil.

“Kyiiii!”

An imp made a threatening gesture with his pitchfork by feigning a stabbing motion in the air.

“Uuu...I hate those things.”

Bertelgia, who had returned to her normal size, flew off to some high perch where the imps could not reach her. Sungchul scowled at the approaching imps and extended his finger.

‘Glare’

Out of his fingertip, a beam of light burst forth toward the imp’s body.

“Kyiiii!”

The imp who had been hit thrashed about wildly before his body became charred. The imps who had been making empty threats suddenly rushed toward Sungchul together.

Swish! Swish!

The rusted pitchforks flew toward Sungchul’s body. He dodged the spears with little effort, then activated Glare once again.

Sizzle~ Sizzle~

The imps who had been pierced by the light hobbled about before dying. After consecutively killing ten imps, the imps who had been full of spirit began to hesitate.

‘It should be making an appearance soon.’

Thud!

The earth began to crack, and something came forth from below. With a height of about 5 meters, it was a large demon with an odd appearance of a fish head and the body of a man.

“Kyaaaa!”

A demon of the abyss. They were one of the gatekeepers guarding the entrance to the Demonic Realm. The only reason why Sungchul bothered to kill the worthless imps was to call out this fellow.

The demon race from the depths below had the intelligence of a fish, but they were infamous for their powerful strength and dexterity along with their incredible vitality. If he could kill one of these monsters that even the magicians of the Royal Court could not overcome, Sungchul judged that he would be able to do meaningful damage to Max.

“Kyaaaaaa!!”

The Sea Demon began to scream as if to shatter the sky and the earth as its torso was revealed. The imps that had been bellowing a moment ago now scattered into every nook and cranny to escape; Sungchul and the Sea Demon were the only ones remaining on the wild lands.

Its empty fish eyes glared at Sungchul until it suddenly raised its arm into the air to strike him down.

Slam!

As the fist covered in scales struck the ground, the earth shook in the impact as it shattered the surface launching rubbles in the air.

“Hey, shouldn’t we escape?”

Bertelgia, who had suddenly attached herself to Sungchul’s back, spoke in a meek voice.

“....”

Sungchul instead took another step forward.

“Uuuh... it might not even be enough to have 10 lives if you’re with this person.”

Bertelgia resigned to being in the safest place, Sungchul’s pocket, and shrunk down to a compact size as though she was throwing up

her hands.

‘How long will this work for?’

Sungchul didn’t have great expectations. He realised that his magic power didn’t exceed 200, and the magic he was truly in command of was only a third circle magic. The reason he was facing against this demonfolk despite this was to witness his limits with his own two eyes. Sungchul then began to move.

The fish’s eyes continued to track his path. Sungchul dashed beside it and extended a finger toward the Sea Demon.

‘Glare’

A beam of light akin to a spear stretched out from the tip of his finger and targeted the demon’s arm.

Sizzle-

A dark smoke rose from the Sea Demon’s flesh, but that was it.

“Gyaaaaa!!”

The Sea Demon let out a roar before swinging its arm in a frenzy to attack Sungchul.

Slam! Slam! Slam!

The ground shook, and the earth exploded like a fountain. Such an attack was meaningless toward Sungchul. He continued to evade lazily, as though he was on a picnic, and dodged all of its attacks while continuing to experiment with his only offensive magic on various body parts of the Sea Demon.

Arms, legs, torso, face, then eyes.

Sizzle-

The Sea Demon's eyes were seared with a beam of light, but as the fish's eyelids blinked from the bottom-up, Sungchul's attack was easily negated.

'It is still too early.'

He knew this, but the fact that he couldn't even manage to scratch the creature was a depressing thought. He needed a stronger magic. He retreated for now.

The Sea Demon roared in the distance and continued to pound the earth. Whether that was a roar of victory or a threatening gesture born of instinct, Sungchul didn't know.

"Hey, Bertelgia."

Sungchul forcefully dragged Bertelgia from his pocket.

“Hear not! See not!”

Bertelgia appeared as though she had clenched her eyes and shut her ears, although it was a question whether a book could do such things.

“Pay attention.”

When Sungchul shook her a few times, she regained her senses and looked at her surroundings.

“Huh? What about the fish-face?”

“Over there.”

Sungchul pointed toward the Sea Demon howling in the distance. Bertelgia slid down Sungchul’s hand as though she was melting in comfort, and also let out a sigh of relief.

“Let’s not play such dangerous games anymore.”

“It’s not dangerous at all. More than that, I have something to ask you.”

“About what?”

“Is there any Alchemy quest that you’re aware of that can raise magic power by a large margin?”

“Alchemy quest?”

Bertelgia, who had been drooping against his palm, suddenly perked up and exploded into her original size. She also fluttered before Sungchul with vigour and spoke in a different voice.

“Are you saying that you’re prepared to walk the path of the Creationist?”

“Creationist or whatever is fine. I just need a quest that can bump up my magic power.”

It wasn’t the time for beggars to be choosers. Sungchul was prepared to do anything it took for him to accomplish his goal.

Bertelgia floated in the air in thought, then spoke without much confidence.

“Mmm... There aren’t many that you can do at your state.”

“That right?”

“You’re too inexperienced, even if you’ve created a 5th level Alchemic item. I’d recommend making every Alchemic item below

the 4th level at least once.”

“How many are there in total that qualifies?”

“82 items.”

It was a bleak number.

“Mm. I’ll take back my previous request.”

Sungchul gave up on it without any hesitation, but the one who jumped up was Bertelgia.

“Hey! Wait a minute! You’ve made up to 12 items below 4th level so far. You just need to synthesise about 70 more items!”

“That’s still too many.”

“It’s not that many! Not that many at all! It can be easily accomplished if you make a habit of practicing Alchemy in your daily life!”

“Mmm...”

Sungchul didn’t look convinced, but he decided it might not be bad to follow Bertelgia’s advice.

‘If I synthesize successfully, my magic power and intuition will naturally rise by a small amount. It might not be bad to try one or two on a daily basis as a change of pace.’

Sungchul thought to use every method possible. However, anything relating to Alchemy was more of a secondary objective. He decided to seek out a certain man after his fight with the Sea Demon.

Altugius’ son and Sarasa’s father. The man going by the alias Deckard. It wasn’t clear what level of mage he truly was, but what was clear was that he was not someone average. It was said that he was looking for a method to stop the Calamity. He had to be desperate to seek out ways to hone his own strength. That is... if he’s anything like Sungchul was 8 years ago.

‘I think Altugius said that he was active as a mercenary mage along the Storm Battlefront?’

The Storm Battlefront. It was a shaky alliance created out of desperation that formed one of the three major factions of the northern continent. Unlike other factions, the Storm Battlefront comprised mainly of dwarves who used their peerless dwarven architecture to create a powerful network of fortifications to block any possible demonic invasion. They also have been known to surpass the withered Order of the Iron Blood Knights as the most powerful faction in the north.

The problem was that Sungchul had poor relations with the dwarves. It was because he had stolen Fal Garaz, an item revered as a divine artifact, from their temple.

‘At the very least, this isn’t somewhere I can use my real name.’

Dwarves had a historic tradition of recording those that sinned against them in a book of grudges. The name that took the first line of this book of grudges was none other than Sungchul Kim.

Chapter 57 – Border Of The Demon World (2)

“What kind of name would suit me?”

Even Sungchul sometimes asked himself this question. He began to think deeply about the alias he would use when he arrived on the frontline. It seemed like a childish concern, but it meant a lot to him. He believed that a name held power.

For instance, the name Sungchul was possibly the most widely-known name in this world. It had a weight of its own. What if some other name such as Ahram Park or Krill Regall was chosen? He would be considered nothing more than generic minion A.

“How about Eckheart?”

Bertelgia had been watching Sungchul’s deliberation from the side and offered her opinion.

“No.”

He flatly rejected it, and Bertelgia’s face briefly turned red. He narrowed his options down to three, then etched it into a rock with his fingertip. Esper Kim, Chulin Kim. Favre Kim.

“Oooo....”

Bertelgia let out a taunt.

“Something wrong?”

“Something’s very wrong. What the heck is Favre? You sound like someone that never had any friends!”

“It’s the name of an academic more famous than your dad.”

“Don’t say such things. Anyways, all three options are bad.”

Sungchul’s eyes lit up.

“What’s the issue?”

“Why do all the names have Kim? Can’t you just forget the Kim? Why do you think you’re using an alias for? Isn’t it to hide your identity?”

Bertelgia said everything she wanted to say despite fluttering about wildly.

“....”

Sungchul grew quiet. He knew that Bertelgia wasn’t full of nonsense.

“If you got nothing, then pick something mage-like. I thought

you were going to go to the frontline as a mage anyways?”

“An Alchemist to be exact.”

“Then a name with an ‘S’ or ‘T’ at the end would work! I don’t know why, but famous mage names usually end with S or T.”

After hearing her suggestion, Sungchul immediately added an S and removed the Kim. He added three more names for a total of 6 names in the rock: Espers, Chulins, Favres, Espert, Chulint, Favret. Sungchul rubbed his chin as he muttered the names to himself to check how it sounded. On the other end, Bertelgia was fuming.

“Why are you so attached to those three names? All three are awful!”

“In the end, I think they all sound better than Eckheart?”

“Ugh. Good for you. Really. Why not just use a name from the Seven Heroes at this point?”

“The Seven Heroes?”

A strange light flashed in his eyes. The names of the Seven Heroes weren’t that well known, but their names had significant weight since the past. Sungchul began to recall their names in his head.

Desfort, the leader of the Seven Heroes. Dragoman, one who reached the peak with swords. Daltanius, pursuer of endless strength. Sajators, the mage of multicast. White Phantom, the assassin without a record. Vestiare, Echo Mage. Ga Xi Ong the Devourer of Souls. Which name among these should be chosen?

“I choose White Phantom.”

“White Phantom? That weirdo who wraps himself with that white cloth thing?”

“You’ve seen White Phantom?”

“Yea, but only from a distance. I haven’t even heard him speak. He’s a lunatic like the other Seven Heroes, and writes instead of using his perfectly good tongue to communicate.”

“I see. How did you manage to meet him though?”

He knew that Bertelgia and Eckheart were from the same era as the Seven Heroes. However, there was no guarantee that these people would ever meet just because they lived in the same period. This was especially because the Seven Heroes were great figures in their time, but Bertelgia answered his question without hesitation.

“The Seven Heroes were regulars at dad’s shop. They always ordered a bunch of stuff before they left for battle.”

“Hoh... is that right?”

“Yep. That’s why my dad called himself the Eighth Hero.”

“What did the Seven Heroes usually buy?”

“Well, I was really young, so I don’t remember much, but it was mostly potions like Elixir and high firepower Alchemic Bomb. The bratty kid mage and the bitchy woman bought mana essence and Dark Crystal.”

“Could I make that with my ability right now?”

“You could make some, but not others.”

Sungchul nodded at her assessment. He felt amused by Alchemy, but he was getting fed up with making useless alchemy items. However, he might feel motivated if he could start producing items worthy of the seven heroes.

‘I think it might help if I synthesise things every now and then to raise my alchemy technique and knowledge as she suggested. They might be good for me.’

He chose the name and his goal and descended from the wild rocky mountain moving towards the stronghold.

The Battlefront of the Demonic Realm was largely divided into four regions. The first region was the flat plains to the west that was mostly a wasteland. This region contained the most number of conflicts out of the four regions and was occupied by the Order of the Iron Blood Knights. They utilised immovable fortifications in key locations along with the powerful strength of their knights to defend their region.

The second region was a mountainous area with rugged mountain ranges that appeared like folding screens. They were occupied by the dwarves, known as the children of the mountain range, within impregnable fortifications that the demons wouldn't dare invade.

The next region was a sea of trees underneath the mountain range. This region was occupied by an alliance of Elves called the Varen Aren. Antagonising these people was like making an enemy of the forest itself. There were no records of hostile demons surviving the forest.

The final region was a zone of retreat behind the three regions. This region that can't exactly be called the frontlines was occupied by the allied fleet of the Human Empire, mercenaries of the Coalition of Merchants, the Swordmasters of the Ancient Kingdom, and a mishmash of various backup forces held in reserves. Nevertheless, Marquess Marin Breggas, one of the top six heroes among the thirteen heroes of the continent, had gained the authority over these forces. Sungchul picked Trowin, a city within the zone of retreat, as his destination.

The reason he didn't head directly to the Storm Battlefront was

simple. The zone of retreat was where most people congregate, and it was known that all information regarding the frontlines flowed through here. More than anything, the recruitment of mercenaries occur here too. The free city of Trowin was the busiest area of the zone of retreat and was most apt for Sungchul's needs.

“ ... ”

Sungchul arrived at the walls of Trowin at early morning. However, the city guards were unusually grim. The city borders were ceaselessly patrolled by packs of soldiers comprised of werewolves, and knights on gryphons were looking down from the skies.

Sungchul could force his entry, but he didn't wish to attract such attention to himself at this place. He would go through proper channels if he could help it. After coming to this decision, he hid within a field of reeds and observed the situation. He overheard conversations from merchants, housewives, and soldiers until midday and got a grasp of the situation within the city.

There was only one reason due to which the city was on full alert; It was the Enemy of the World. It was known that the Enemy of the World had left for the Demonic Realm, so notices requesting for high alert with the authority of each ruler had been spread within the frontlines as it couldn't be predicted when the Enemy of the World will appear again.

“Really. What did you do that made everyone hate you so much?”

Bertelgia couldn't watch any more of this and muttered to herself.

"I did cause some accidents. I emptied a vault, stole a hammer, destroyed a Royal Palace, and killed a rotten prince..."

"Wait, now that I'm listening to all this. It doesn't really sound like a little?"

When Bertelgia retorted, Sungchul shook his head and continued.

"It isn't that simple. First and foremost, they resent me because I am powerful. Next, it is because I disagree with their ideas. A good mixture of the two created this level of fear and resentment."

Sungchul pulled out an outfit from the Soul Storage. It was a worn-out brown coat and military pants that had become grey as its colours faded away. Sungchul pulled off the clothes he had been wearing without thought and changed into his new outfit.

"Ugh. Even if I am a book, I am a maiden at heart so I'd appreciate it if you didn't just change without warning."

Bertelgia made a serious request while he changed. Of course, Sungchul didn't give her plea a second thought.

"Isn't it enough to just close your eyes?"

Sungchul put on a snap buttoned plaid shirt over his muscled body.

“Mmm...”

No matter how you look at it, the plaid shirt looked bad. It must have turned out like this because he had been stealing clothes of the summoned at the Golden City before entering the Summoning Palace without checking them. Sungchul ripped the shirt off and buried it before pulling out another shirt of a similar style.

“Mmm.”

He had been trying to put in some effort behind it, but his outfit hadn't progressed an inch from his hobo appearance.

“Wouldn't the clothes of a summoned stand out?”

Bertelgia flew around Sungchul once and judged his outfit. Sungchul shook his head.

“There are several groups of summoned that purposely try to wear their styles of clothes similar to their original world's.”

“Why?”

“It is to avoid losing their distinct identity even after coming to

this world. Well, a lot of the people that choose to keep the clothes from the Other World often choose the path to reincarnate.”

A bitter memory passed by Sungchul’s eyes.

‘If only she had chosen to reincarnate, all of this could have been avoided.’

The past was the past. Sungchul brushed the memory aside and looked onto the main road.

“Anyways, how will you get into the city? I don’t think they’ll just let you in.”

“How many people do you think comes in and out of Trowin? It’s thousands if not tens of thousands of people. It’s not easy for a couple of guards to inspect all of them”

Sungchul stood on the side of the main road and waited for a wagon on route to the city. It didn’t take long for such a wagon to appear.

It was a transport wagon with a forgettable old man, pulled by a pair of old and skinny horses. Sungchul carefully looked at the wagon before he let it past.

“Why did you let that one go? I think you’d be safe if you hid in the stuff at the back.”

Bertelgia spoke from his pocket, but Sungchul just shook his head.

“It’s common for guards to press down harder on security if the wagon looks poor and the horseman looks spineless.”

Sungchul let several more wagons pass until a massive stagecoach pulled by a team of eight angelic horses, the Pegasus, approached from the distance. Seeing that the stagecoach was pulled by pegasuses and it had a floatation stone instead of wheels meant that it was a high-class stagecoach capable of flight.

“Hmm. That one looks like someone with some money would be riding it?”

Sungchul nodded at Bertelgia’s words and blocked its path.

“Could I get a ride? It is quite bothersome to walk all that distance.”

Sungchul handed out a single silver coin to the driver. The driver let out a laugh and shot Sungchul a cold glare.

“Do you think you can ride this stagecoach with just a single silver coin? Get out of the way!”

He raised the whip in order to move the carriage, but Sungchul

pulled out something different. The driver's eyes changed. It was because a shiny gold coin was held in front of him.

“It was only because I wasn't aware of the ways of the world. Is this enough?”

Sungchul held out his gold coin. The driver looked at him once again.

Sungchul looked like a typical summoned on the outside. He looked pitiful, but his appearance was that of a young man in between his 20s and 30s. The driver had recently heard of the existence of the preselected among the summoned who received privileged treatment upon arrival to the Other World.

‘Is he one of those idiots? Whatever, I can just earn some coin.’

Finally, he received the coin and carefully examined its surface. Where there was supposed to be a mark for the mint, it was etched with the marking of the Human Empire foundry.

‘It's clean.’

There had been an order from higher-ups. Report anyone with an unmarked coin to a superior officer. It wasn't something that even a driver from a transportation company affiliated with the Coalition of Merchants could ignore. Also, the coin was confirmed to be without problems. There was no reason for the driver to reject Sungchul.

“Open the second door and get on. Don’t bother the other guests.”

Sungchul excused himself before entering the cabin. When Sungchul opened the door to the cabin, Bertelgia whispered in a quiet voice.

“It looks like you’ve done this before?”

“....”

Sungchul didn’t confirm or deny it. The cabin was more or less empty. The only guests were a middle-aged noblewoman with a fan made of the tail feathers of a rare bird, a man of sophisticated airs reading a book with a monocle, and a stubborn-looking male dwarf whose feet didn’t quite reach the wagon floor. It was just these three. They glanced over at Sungchul as he stepped onto the coach, but didn’t make much of it. However, Sungchul could feel a bit of repulsion from their faces, especially the noblewoman.

“Let us leave.”

The coach left on a relatively light note. Green farmlands could be seen outside the window as they passed the rural villages of the border on their way to the castle gates. There was a formation of 5 guards examining the coaches as they entered.

Due to the coincidental alignment of the wagons, Sungchul was

just barely able to watch a wagon undergo the inspection through the window. The one currently being searched was the rickety load-bearing wagon ridden by the old horseman that he had just passed. Four guards surrounded him as they stood beside the wagon's load with their tridents in hand. Bertelgia squirmed as though she was watching the scene herself inside his pocket. Soon, the head gatekeeper's commanding voice roared.

“Commence Special Search!”

As soon as his order fell, the four guards began to stab away at the bale of hay with their tridents with fearsome vigor.

“Full Power Spear Thrust!”

It was a fearsome inspection that would not only make a pincushion of anyone inside but shred them to pieces as well. Sungchul stroked Bertelgia in his pocket and quietly whispered to her.

“Do you get it now?”

Bertelgia shook her body lightly. Soon the turn for the coach that Sungchul was riding came. Unlike the previous search, the guards and the gatekeeper had a completely different attitude. They didn't even dare to open up the coach door, and only spoke to the coach driver. After a few words from the driver, the gatekeeper nodded and gestured to let them through.

“Pass!”

The noblewoman’s face grew ugly, but she didn’t make any further actions. She had decided that exercising her patience a bit longer was less effort than reporting the repulsive man. Thankfully, this allowed Sungchul safe entry into the town center of Trowin. It was an economic result at the expense of some time and a gold coin.

Sungchul, after arriving at the town center, entered into the back alleys to seek out an information broker. He inquired between several information brokers to find the one who had his finger on the pulse of the battlefield. The one who met the qualifications was a disabled veteran missing an eye and a leg. Sungchul held out several silver coins and asked a question.

“I am seeking a mercenary mage by the name of Deckard.”

“Deckard?”

The former soldier looked up at him with his remaining eye. When Sungchul nodded, the man let out a sigh before speaking again.

“If the Deckard you speak of is the mercenary mage affiliated with the Storm Battlefront, He is probably... well... he’s most likely dead by now.”

“What does that mean?”

“He committed a crime and got assigned to the suicide unit.”

Chapter 58 – Suicide Unit (1)

It was a common occurrence for soldiers of both private and state armies who have committed a crime to be assigned to dangerous missions to absolve themselves. However, the Demonic Battlefield was unlike other battlefields in the sense that the repercussions were significant and the enemies were existences to be feared. The ratio of deserters was significantly higher than other battlefields which made strict military discipline a requirement. The suicide unit was one of the measures set forth to manage the frontlines of the Demonic Realm.

The soldiers of the frontlines of the Demonic Realm treated being assigned to the suicide unit as a death sentence. It was because the casualty rate was at 90%, but as far as anyone could tell, the 90% was simply an approximation, and the suicide unit almost always met with complete annihilation. As someone that served on the frontlines of the Demonic Realms the longest, there was no way that Sungchul didn't know of this matter.

“What is the suicide unit?”

He responded to Bertelgia's question with a brief answer.

“A fish on a chopping block.”

Sungchul followed the road to the recruitment centre to put in a request as a mercenary. As the battlefield always had a need for soldiers, their background check was considerably loose. The mercenaries that came to the frontlines were almost always

criminals or debtors escaping their debts. Being stringent with the check would only reduce the amount of soldiers that were willing to fight on the frontlines.

“What will be your branch of service?”

A recruitment officer with a grotesque scar in the shape of a devil’s claw across his face asked the question with a grave voice.

“Mage.”

“There are more than a few type of mages... do you specialise in dimensional magic? Supporting magic? Combat specialist?”

“Combat.”

Sungchul added one more thing.

“Alchemy.”

“What good is Alchemy... Just forget about that one unless you want to be stuck in a factory pumping out potions.”

“ ... ”

When the military branch was selected, the recruitment officer asked regarding his desired frontline.

“How about the battlefield supervised by the Varan-Aren Tribal Alliance? It’s a good opportunity to get close to some pretty elf women.”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t get it up.”

“Oh... that’s quite awful.”

“I want to go to the Storm Battlefield.”

“Storm Battlefield... well, it might be better for a man that can’t get it up to end up in a place full of dwarves.”

The matter got wrapped up at a rapid pace. Sungchul got dispatched to the Storm Battlefield as a mercenary mage. The location that he was dispatched to was a small fortress known as the Black Hills, and it worked out fine since he caused trouble from the very first day he arrived.

“White Phantom! I hereby transfer you to the suicide unit for violence towards a superior officer, insubordination, and destruction of property!”

After the order was passed down, Sungchul had a cloth with the number 34 written on it forcibly attached to his ragged coat.

“What’s this?”

At Sungchul's question, the soldier who was sewing it onto him answered curtly.

“What do you mean what is it? It's your prisoner number.”

Sungchul was efficiently sent to the suicide unit of the frontlines. It was even decided that he was to be transported by a Griffin. The rider of the Griffin laughed loudly as he dropped Sungchul off.

“This will be your burial grounds. Recruit, it is suitable for idiots like you that fuck up on day 1!”

“...”

“I might be back in about two weeks. Let's see if you're still alive by then!”

The Griffin blew up a storm as it ascended into the sky and headed north. Sungchul looked around his surroundings. There were several tents that appeared to belong to the suicide unit within the basin area surrounded by hills. Sungchul compared the number of tents with the number of wood-burning stoves to estimate their headcount.

‘Approximately 300 people?’

However, the number was revealed to be closer to 100 members.

They told him that they suffered heavy casualties that cost them half of their members in a major battle recently.

The vice-captain of the suicide unit, Genghis Ahron, was a middle-aged man that looked as ferocious and wily as a panther. He appeared as though he could hold his own in a fight, and it reflected his ability. He was a former Swordmaster of the Ancient Kingdom in the ranks of superhuman people who had over 300 points in Strength, Dexterity and Endurance each. However, his nickname within the suicide unit was Rockhead. He was an idiot who couldn't even manage simple mathematics.

“Welcome. Number 34. To the Suicide unit that is.”

“...”

He quickly scanned through the documents that Sungchul brought with his eyes before speaking in what sounded like a mutter.

“Now let's see here... Assault of a superior officer and insubordination... with a bit of property damage for fun? Let me just let you know one thing.”

Rockhead smirked and pulled out his blade part-way.

Srrrng.

The unusual blade wrapped in a violet light revealed itself.

“Insubordination against me means no more neck.”

“....”

When the warning ended, a stumpy dwarf approached Sungchul

“Is the warning done? Number 34?”

It wasn't an exhibition, but the dwarf was draped in a massive armour that had the number 0 written on a cloth attached to its chest.

“Who might you be?”

“I am the head honcho of the suicide unit, ‘Hell Fist’ Arkaard.”

Arkaard showed Sungchul the fist that he was so proud of. The steel gauntlet wrapped around his fingers sparkled with the phrase ‘Hell Fist’.

“However, just call me number 0. That's the Suicide unit tradition!”

“...”

“Anyways... there are no officers here, commissioned or not.

There were both in the past, but they all ate shit during our last battle.”

“I’m looking for a mercenary mage by the name of Deckard.”

“Deckard? Ah, are you talking about number 22?”

Arkaard’s face lost composure for a moment.

“Does he happen to be dead?”

Sungchul immediately followed up with another question, but Arkaard shook his head.

“He’s alive.”

Amazing. Bertelgia shook her body from joy in Sungchul’s stead.

“But, that friend will not live much longer.”

“Did he receive a critical wound?”

Arkaard shook his head once again.

“No, he continues to volunteer himself to the most dangerous missions. It’s as though he came to this place to die.”

“I wish to meet him at least once. Where can I find him?”

Arkaard pointed toward a particular tent. It was a cosy tent placed next to a pointed rock that looked like the blade of a spear. Sungchul displayed the appropriate amount of formality before excusing himself and headed towards the tent that Deckard was supposedly residing in.

He could hear the sound of blades clashing and ragged breaths being drawn near the tent. It was the sound of two men sparring. One was wielding a sword while the other wielded a staff, and they were sparring with such intensity as if they were fighting on the battlefield itself.

The one wielding the sword ended in victory, and the one with the staff dropped his weapon and fell onto his butt while sighing loudly.

“Isn’t this enough? Deckard?”

The one wielding the sword asked.

Sungchul’s sights turned towards the man referred to as Deckard. He was well past middle age, but his face still had remnants of the youth of his past. He looked more like Sarasa than Altugius.

The man looked too tired to even lift his own body, yet he called

out for another challenge. The one wielding the sword firmly declined.

“I’d rather not exhaust myself before a battle. We never know when we’re going to be sent in, so let’s just call it quits here.

After the spar ended, the onlookers scattered. Sungchul waited for the onlookers to disappear before he approached Deckard standing by himself.

“Are you Deckard?”

Deckard was still breathing quite heavily as he looked up towards Sungchul.

“Who are you? I don’t think I’ve seen you before?”

Sungchul handed him the item he had received from Altugius. Deckard’s face lit up in surprise.

“How did you get a hold of this?”

“Professor Altugius sends me to you. He told me to seek you if I sought to raise my magic power substantially within the shortest amount of time.”

“Ah, you’ve voluntarily come to the suicide unit for such a purpose?”

“It isn’t the time for me to choose my methods.”

“Could I take a look at your stats then?”

Sungchul agreed to Deckard’s request. Deckard pulled out a scroll, which he ripped apart, then he looked at Sungchul’s stats. Laughter soon exploded from his mouth.

“Quite the balls on you. I’d rather not say this right off the bat, but isn’t it excessive to come to the frontlines in the Demonic Realm with only that level of stats? If I may be cruelly honest from our first meeting, I think you’ll just drag us down, never mind raising any stats.”

Deckard harshly criticised Sungchul.

“However, isn’t this place as such that I can return no longer?”

Sungchul had received the order to complete five missions under the suicide unit. If he left the suicide unit before completing this order, he would be considered as a deserter. Sungchul was referring to this fact.

Deckard simply looked indifferent. He put on the shirt dangling under the tent and spoke again.

“The only reason I have come here is to push myself to my limits.

It was for the express purpose of cultivating fast growth that I have constantly placed myself in dangerous and difficult-to-overcome situations. Such as the man now called the Enemy of the World had done.”

Deckard would never know even in his wildest dreams that the man he spoke of as the Enemy of the World was standing right before him. He continued speaking.

“It’s not really a boast, but I have built this body through considerable training to be a powerful mage and warrior. Thanks to this, I was able to preserve at least my life through many dire situations during my missions. How about you? I would imagine it’d be difficult to survive.”

“If I do survive?”

Sungchul retorted in a calm voice.

“If I do survive, will you impart what you know to me?”

Deckard looked deep into Sungchul’s face, then spoke curtly.

“Rockhead is planning some stupid plan for tomorrow right at this moment. Try and survive that. If you do, I’ll let you in on a quest.”

The next day.

As Deckard had said, Rockhead gathered all the members of the unit. 80 lifers had gathered excluding the injured. He stood on a podium and spoke in a uselessly heroic voice.

“As you all know, the demon scouts have assaulted a particular guard post affiliated with our Storm Battlefront. That guard post itself doesn’t have much importance, but what matters is its location. Headquarters says that we must recapture that guard post regardless of the costs.”

Rockhead spoke of his plan next.

“Currently, our numbers are at 83 members. 20 in the north, 20 in the east, 20 in the west, and the final 20 will come with me and attack the fortification from the south.”

Surprisingly, that was the entire plan. Rockhead didn’t impart any idea on how each designated unit will coordinate with each other or move at all. He only had an attack from every side on his mind.

“If we attack from every side, the demons will not be able to endure it!”

It was truly a thoughtless plan, but no one dared to say another word. The fact that Rockhead was feared for his strength was one thing, but they also knew that he wasn’t a man to be reasoned with.

Rockhead soon divided all of the troops into 4, and the veteran soldiers were designated as the leader of each group. Each group composed of a unit of 20 was given a magic scroll for signalling, and their march towards death began.

Sungchul entered the unit designated as the third group. The strategy went along relatively smoothly, and the suicide unit arrived at the guard post with no major issues. They then encircled the guard post containing the demons.

“Let us go, my fellow brethren of sin!”

Rockhead held his blade up high.

Uwooong–

A bluish aura emanated from the violet-tinted blade. It was the speciality of a Sword Master: Sword Aura. He stood at the front to lead the attack.

“Follow me! Let us all be atoned!”

The demons stationed on the guard post were mostly weaklings, and their numbers were few. Rockhead climbed the post wall and climbed onto the watch tower. The demons could do nothing but be helplessly slain by his blade. The guard post was recaptured quite easily. No casualties. It was all over before the eastern and northern soldiers could even begin their attack.

“Isn’t this too easy?”

The veteran soldiers began to feel anxious. The all-important strategic point had been hollowed out with nothing but bait. If the demons intended to defend the guard post, there would be a Balrog at the very least or a Baal-grade demon or two, but only feeble goblins and imps were all that were stationed at the guard post.

The soldiers felt a sense of Deja Vu. The situation unfolding in the current moment seemed extremely similar to the last battle, one where half of the suicide units had fallen in a tragic combat. Finally, a veteran soldier, Arkaard, sent a word to Rockhead.

“Commander, I think the demons gave up the guard post a bit too easily. It reeks of a trap. It might be good to fall back for now, and watch their movements.”

This head of rock wasn’t one to listen to reason. He instead raged at Arkaard and criticised him.

“What kind of pussy talk is that? Number 0! Can you call yourself a suicide unit member after such talk?”

“But... it just doesn’t feel right. Didn’t we lost half of our unit in a similar fashion last battle?”

Normal people would feel discouraged after experiencing such utter defeat, but Rockhead wasn’t as such. He spoke boldly without

a hint of shame on his face.

“Even if this was the trap of those demons, we must hold our ground!”

He dug into his position further by gathering the soldiers and relaying a speech in a heroic voice once more.

“Our mission is to secure the guard post until the main forces arrive. The first stage has been completed successfully. All that is left is to hold this guard post until our lives are spent. Hold your grounds, my brothers!”

Deckard who heard the speech let out a frosty retort.

“I don’t recall having such a brother.”

Sungchul was in agreement too, and soon the gut feeling became a reality. Five soldiers deserted. One of the deserters were caught by Rockhead and hung as an example, but that was only the beginning. When the sun fell, signs of demons began to appear from all over.

“Objects suspected to be Hell Siege Engines detected! Approaching from the north!”

“A swarm of imps suspected in the hundreds climbing the mountain ridge and approaching from the west.”

“One Balrog confirmed! More than two Baal-grades approaching as well.”

When the darkness fell, the Suicide unit composed of 80 members were surrounded by devils and demonfolk in the thousands.

“Didn’t I say so? It’s not so easy surviving in this place.”

Deckard spoke in a silence appropriate for the Storm Battlefront after approaching Sungchul. He handed Sungchul a single scroll. It was a long-distance teleportation scroll.

“If you rip this scroll, you’ll be teleported to the orange-tinted mountaintop that is the suicide unit headquarters.”

“Why are you giving this to me?”

Sungchul bluntly threw out his question. Deckard simply scratched his head.

“You seem to have Alchemist within your classes. If the situation seems disadvantageous just rip the scroll and bow down to the Storm Battlefront liaison and beg for forgiveness. In exchange for being pulled out of the suicide unit, you can receive a pardon through slave labour in a potion factory. Isn’t it better working to the bone for two years than dying?”

It appeared as though Deckard had been giving Sungchul a lot of consideration. However, his concerns were misplaced. Sungchul returned the scroll and asked another question in a calm voice.

“The promise from before. Is it still valid?”

Deckard only smiled bitterly.

“It’s valid.”

Deckard let out a sigh before leaving Sungchul. Not long after he left, the sound of drumming could be heard. It was the drums of the demonfolk. The shrill sound of a bone horn followed soon after that, sharply tearing through the air. The demonic forces were soon set to attack.

Chapter 59 – Suicide Unit (2)

The war machine made of steel in the shape of a gigantic scorpion spat out green flames from the tip of its tail. Hell Siege Engines were frequently used by Demon forces during large-scale sieges. The cackling of demons echoed in the dry air as the Hell Siege Engines spat out flames. The magic cannon of the devils installed on the portion of the Siege Engine which resembled the mouth of a scorpion shot out green fireballs. The fireballs drew an arc in the night sky as it struck the walls of the guard post.

Boom!

The entire guard post shook as the inextinguishable green flame roared ferociously at the point of impact, causing tiny demons made of fire to scatter about like ants.

“Kikikiki!”

They were from a lower class of demons called the Minor Ember Spirit. All they knew was sticking to nearby people and cause them to ignite, but even these demons were a danger in a chaotic battlefield.

Genghis Aaron, better known as Rockhead, stepped onto the Minor Ember Spirits with his steel boots and extinguished it.

“Stomp on those tiny shits and get rid of ‘em unless you want to catch on fire later!”

The soldiers followed his order and quickly began to stomp out the Minor Ember Spirits. However, the siege engines continued to unleash their payload, leaving dozens of new Minor Ember Spirits to run amok within the walls as the vanguards of the Demon army began their advance while beating their war drums.

“Humans! Kill ‘em all!”

Monsters reaching 5 meters in height began to reveal their forms in the darkness. They were Depraved Trolls. Steel blinders were tightly attached to their flesh and skull so as to obstruct their vision and vile demonic magic was cast upon them to further empower their brute strength in order to use them as a vanguard in large scale battles.

“Mages and archers to the front! Focus fire onto the big ‘uns!”

An elven soldier holding a bow pulled out an arrow shining in a silvery light from his quiver and pulled his string. He would have aimed for its eyes if they were normal trolls, but due to its steel blinders, it didn’t have any particular weaknesses. The elven soldier aimed for the imp riding on a palanquin tightly strapped to the back of the troll’s neck.

The Imp was a sort of a driver, which controlled the troll’s movement by manipulating a wooden peg buried deep enough into the troll’s neck that it touched the spine.

Fwiik~

The Elf's arrow sailed through the air and accurately pierced through the Imp's collar.

“Kyeeek!”

The arrow had punched through the imp's neck. It fell leftward while still holding onto the reins, and the Depraved Troll followed the dead imp's lead turning towards the left.

“Gwuuuuuh~”

The troll continued turning left until it was on a collision course with another troll.

“Get it! Get that thing!”

Other imps frantically pulled off the dead imp from the driver's seat and tried to regain control, but another arrow from the elf struck the replacement imp's body, causing the blind troll to complete its collision with the other troll.

“Gwuuuuuh!!!”

The troll that had been tortured continuously throughout its life began to swing its fists in a mad frenzy at the thing it had collided with. The other troll didn't hesitate and swung back in response.

Boom! Boom!

As the two massive trolls began to fight to the death in the middle of the vanguard units, the enemy's assault devolved into chaos. Dozens of imps marching around the trolls' feet were crushed to death, causing the following procession to momentarily stop.

“Good job, Fagan!”

Deckard tossed a compliment towards the elven man, then headed to the front of the guard post with his staff in hand. Two healthy-looking men grabbed their shields and protected him. Soon, Deckard's eyes became dyed in a shimmering light.

“You shall feel the might of the Heavens!”

Complex magical formation appeared around his staff. Sungchul could not decipher the concepts behind the magical formation, but he could make a guess towards what magic he was trying to use.

‘Is he trying to use Meteor?’

The dark clouds covering the sky suddenly cleared and something fell from above.

“It's M-Meteor!!!”

The Devils pointed towards the sky and screamed out in alarm, but no salvation awaited them. Stuck in between the rear guards and the brawling trolls, they could do nothing as the blue comet flew down onto their heads.

C-c-c-crash!!!

A massive explosion occurred in the middle of the enemy's battle formation, and everything surrounding it was swept away. When the dust settled, countless corpses of Devils were revealed in a concentric circle. This was the might of Meteor which was widely considered as the only reason Cosmomancy existed.

Genghis looked at the scene with smug eyes while stroking his sideburns.

“As expected of Number 23. The ace of the Suicide Unit!”

However, the assault of the demons was just beginning. The Balrogs and Baals, along with other upper-class demons didn't budge while looking over the battlefield with an oppressive atmosphere from beyond the Hell Siege Engines. To the upper-class demons, it didn't matter if a couple of insignificant demons were killed.

“Keep sending in the insects.”

It was a tried-and-tested tactic to exhaust the enemy with inferior demons, then obliterate the enemy with the Devils afterwards.

They still had plenty of fodder and the night was long. There were hundreds of low-class demons waiting in a formation on a low hill hidden beyond the mountain.

The impressive talent of the Suicide Unit allowed them to repel the approaching enemy, but they eventually lost their edge and became exhausted.

“There is no end to them, sir!”

They were slowly getting caught-up on the battlefield. The elf who had been stumbling the trolls with his impressive archery was now fighting with his blade as he ran out of arrows, and the mages were being driven to exhaustion as they squeezed out the last of their mana.

“These little shits...”

Deckard let out a heavy sigh as he continued to gulp down water from his waterskin, whilst thinking that if he had been drinking mana essence instead, he could have landed another meteor on top of their heads.

“When is the main force coming? We’re defending this spot to our last breath here!”

Genghis was yelling into the bright blue magic formation on the palm of a magician wearing a blue wizard’s hat. Sungchul knew what the magic formation was for. It was a communication

formation. It was a convenient magic that magicians of the school of Empathomancy boasted, which allowed people to transmit voices over long distances like mobile phones.

“I’m sorry, but we weren’t notified in advance regarding the status of the attack strategy. If we were told ahead of time regarding this plan, we would have sent out...”

“Fuck! The order to capture the guard post came from your end!!”

Genghis shouted at the top of his lungs. It was so loud that the chaos of the battlefield seemed to grow silent for a moment afterwards.

“Those fucking bastards. They tell us to capture the guard post, and now they say this? A strategy report? Tell them to go fuck themselves. Fucking bastards! All of my men are about to die! What are they going to do about it? Who’s going to be responsible for this?”

The one holding the magic formation only swallowed his words as though he was suppressed by Genghis’ rage. Genghis clenched his eyes and gritted his teeth.

“Okay, I understand now. First off, we have taken over the guard post, and we are still guarding it. However, you have not sent over the backup forces that were promised, and we are going to lose both the guard post and my men. Do you admit to this?”

“No, Mr Aaron. That isn’t the case at all. If only you submitted the status report, we would have promptly...”

“Can’t you shut the fuck up?!”

“...I’ll call over the chief commander.”

It appeared as though the voice behind the magic formation held back as much as he could as well. Even Genghis who was bellowing until a moment ago stopped and cooled his head.

“It’s fine. I’ll bring up this incident another time. The situation is urgent at the moment. Over and out.”

Genghis gripped the shoulder of the magician wearing the blue hat.

“Sir Genghis!”

The voice could be heard from the magic formation, but he had waved the formation away.

“Bastards. It’s always like this! This is why they’re losing all the major points!”

Genghis spat onto the ground and turned his eyes again towards the battlefield. The battle was taking a turn for the worse. The trolls were all killed, but the gaps created by the Hell Siege Engines

allowed the imps to flood in like the tide and the lower demons to climb the watchtower with ladders.

The casualties of soldiers were minimal, but the conclusion of the battle was becoming clearer as time passed. Arkaard spoke in a rush.

“Commander! We must pull back!”

It wouldn't be a retreat in reality but rather, a final attack to create an escape route.

“Okay! We'll just have to give up the guard post at this point. I'll lead the way so everyone, follow me!”

Genghis held his violet-tinted magic sword and stood at the front. It was timed right after they had repelled another wave of assault from the enemy. The imps and demon soldiers climbed ladders onto the watchtower. Soldiers numbering about 80 repelled the attack with all of their remaining strength. Sungchul was also in the centre of it all.

Two imps with steel tridents rushed towards Sungchul, but he burned them away with Glare. Next was the Demon soldier. The plum-skinned lower demons with horns played a pivotal role in the demonic army as they had little magic power, but had decent abilities and greater physical prowess and stamina than the average human.

“Kwaaa!”

The demon soldier swung a scythe weighing several dozen kilogrammes towards Sungchul. Sungchul dodged the blade with minimal movements, then placed a beam of light within its open mouth.

“Kwaaaaaaak!”

Glare’s beam pierced through the roof of the demon’s mouth and seared its brain. It couldn’t penetrate the helmet, but the demon’s crimson eyes turned white, and it fell at Sungchul’s feet.

“Quite impressive”

Deckard approached Sungchul and covered his back.

“It was nothing.”

Another demon soldier leapt at that moment. This time, it was an assault from the skies.

“Die! Human!”

The winged demihuman with the skull of a bird dove in from the sky with a shout. It held a long spear in its hands covered in steel gauntlets and aimed towards Sungchul’s head.

“Watch out!”

Deckard extended his staff in an effort to cast a spell, but his mana was already exhausted. Glare didn't materialize. Deckard could only watch with eyes filled with terror as the aerial soldier ambushed Sungchul. Sungchul only continued to look forward and it wasn't clear whether he was aware of the ambush.

However, Sungchul's body moved fluidly like water right before the spear could have pierced his skull. His figure appeared like a mirage to the flying demon. There was no impact behind the demon's spear, and its prey was standing off in the distance.

Clang!

The spear which had been thrust with all of the demon's strength was skewered into the ground, and the demon flopped onto the floor with all of its momentum.

“Guuuuh...”

The aerial soldier flapped its large wings and tried to fly, but Sungchul's glare blew away both of its wings.

“Kwaaa!”

The wingless demon rolled about on the floor. Sungchul grabbed an iron mace on the floor and executed the demon.

Pop.

The demon's skull splattered along with its beak.

“Amazing.”

Deckard looked at Sungchul with disbelief.

“You. You don't look like a beginner? Who are you?”

Sungchul was about to turn around to reply, but Genghis' powerful voice swept through like a typhoon.

“Now! Soldiers! I will open us an escape route. Follow my lead!”

Genghis swung his violet-tinted magic sword and began to jump from the watchtower. Demon soldiers wielding long spears tried to fend him off, but they fell away like leaves from a tree as Genghis' blade flashed about in the air.

“Let's go!”

Genghis kicked away the demonic dogs and imps with his feet as he opened up a path.

“Looks like story time is over. It'll truly become dangerous from

this point on, so take care of yourself.”

It was now the soldiers’ turn. They followed Genghis’ lead down the watchtower onto the opened path. The unlucky few became skewered by the raised spears of the demons, while the injured were left to their gruesome fates against the assault of imps and demonic dogs. The survivors fended off the constant assault of the demons as they followed Genghis’ rear with the violet flashes of his sword’s aura guiding their desperate escape.

Deckard was fighting with a sword and shield instead of his staff.

Stab!

A demon soldier fell as it bled out green blood. To the right, Arkaard was slaughtering imps with his axe swinging it like a windmill, and Fagan the elf was decapitating demonic dogs in a dance. Deckard looked towards the rear. There was a single black-haired man wearing the number 34 on a ragged coat following determinedly. There was no fear nor confusion on his face. Completely natural.

‘That man... just who is he?’

He was definitely not any new recruit. That level of leisure and skill ingrained into every fibre of his being was not something that happened overnight.

“Let’s go! I see the end! Keep at it ‘till the end!”

Genghis, who was leading the charge, shouted noisily. Shrill laughter and shouts of mockery could be heard from the rear. The guard post fell back into the hands of demons, and Balrogs and Baals arrogantly flapped their wings in the moonlight while descending on top of the watchtower. The heads of the dead were propped onto skewers, and their flesh became food for imps and demonic dogs.

“Gasp... Gasp...”

Deckard, who was among the survivors, was off to the side, trying to relax. It was a frantic escape against impossible odds.

After they had a moment to catch their breath, he sought out the man who was following behind them. But the man himself, number 34, already stood before Deckard.

“I have survived the battle as promised. It is time to keep your end of the promise.”

He spoke casually without a single hair nor breath out of place.

Chapter 60 – Suicide Unit (3)

Even the veterans were in a state of panic after the massacre that led to the death of half of their unit. However, Number 34 was indifferent despite how recently he had been recruited.

“Just what are you?”

Deckard asked the question with honest curiosity in his eyes. Sungchul figured out his intentions.

‘Was I too hurried?’

It looked as though he earned himself some undue attention, so there was now a need to make up some explanation. A brilliant idea formed in that instant. Sungchul spoke in a low voice.

“I am a Former Returnee.”

Among those who returned to their original world, there are those who have chosen to come back to the Other World. These were people that had tasted bitter failure after being unable to re-adapt into the modern world.

Whatever the reason was, that brought them back here, they are widely regarded as being much more powerful than their status points would otherwise suggest, and a good majority of them actually are.

“A Former Returnee...”

Deckard couldn't hide his surprise at the news.

“I was at the Demonic Battlefront before I returned. I fought at the Forest of the Lichen Fog of the Varan-Aran alliance.”

“It has been long since that forest got taken over by demons.”

“In any case, the battle just now was just one of countless that I've already experienced on a daily basis. It also looked like the demons were more keen on recapturing the guard post rather than our annihilation.”

In reality, the Balrog and Baal that led the demons never stepped forth nor did they release their elite troops. It was nothing more than expending their easily replenishable pawns to chase out the meager humans. Although, it would have taken at least the Balrog himself to take out the frenzied Genghis Aaron.

“Mmm...”

Deckard didn't appear to be completely convinced, but there was some logic to follow in what Sungchul was saying. Sungchul spoke further.

“The reason I want to find a way to get stronger quickly is to survive.”

“If you wanted to survive, this is the wrong place.”

Deckard spoke curtly.

“I am being chased by a nemesis. If I don’t quickly gain strength, I’ll lose my life.”

As Sungchul pressed on, Deckard let out a sigh as he formed a shining orb and handed it to Sungchul. It was an Orb of Knowledge. Those that placed their hands on it would gain the information within.

“Take it. These are all the quests that are appropriate for you.”

Sungchul touched the orb to acquire the information within. A quest soon appeared before him in shining letters.

[No Title]

Grave Cleaning – Clean out the swarm of imps that are disrupting the grave of Elven Warriors. / Reward – Magic Power 5, Mid-Grade Magic Power Essence.

Deckard pointed towards a rocky mountain off to the distance with his staff.

“The graves of Elven archers of the Aran tribe are in that direction. The quest itself should be easy to handle even for you, but the problem lies in getting there.”

“Is it demon territory?”

Deckard nodded at Sungchul’s question then turned his back to walk away.

“Get some shut-eye. Something might suddenly happen at any moment.”

Despite the warning, Sungchul headed off towards the rocky mountain by noon. Despite it being labelled as demon territory, all the opposition was mostly small parties of patrols. Sungchul lightly evaded their efforts and arrived at the grave of the Aran tribe, then proceeded to clean out the imps that built their nest there.

Once the imps were cleared away, the spirits lingering within the gravesite rewarded Sungchul 5 Magic power and a mid-grade mana essence. It wasn’t anything impressive, but Sungchul knew the advantage of stacking up these unimpressive rewards. He leisurely returned to base and proceeded to start another job past his sleeping comrades. It was alchemy.

Sungchul pulled out Eckheart’s portable alchemic cauldron behind the barracks and began gathering ingredients from his surroundings as indicated by Bertelgia. He then proceeded to synthesise everything. Genghis Aaron approached him as he

finished his third Alchemic item.

The healthy man stretched out his arms with a lazy yawn as he walked over to Sungchul and spoke with a look of amusement on his face.

“Recruit? What is it that you are doing?”

“As you can see, I am in the middle of synthesising.”

“I can see that, but I’m asking why you’re doing it.”

Rockhead’s response was unusual. It looked as though it bothered him that Sungchul was synthesising alchemic items.

“I wanted to create some useful items for battle. I learned a lot from the previous battle.”

Rockhead didn’t press the issue any further after listening to such a model response, but instead, he put on a stern face and gave a piece of ‘advice’.

“If you want to survive, I suggest you keep up your physical strength. Anyways, it looks like we’ll have plenty to eat today? Seeing as we’ve cut down on the number of mouths to feed.”

Seeing him spit out such tactless remarks, it was obvious how he earned his nickname. However, Sungchul got the impression that

Genghis Aaron wasn't as simple as he appeared. He was especially cunning when making his report to headquarters. He seemed to have realised the age-old issue of the Demonic Battlefront that was the antiquated organisational structure and seemed to be actively using it to his benefits. It wasn't something he could do if he were truly an idiot.

It soon became evening. Genghis had started up a raucous party. The portions of food and alcohol allocated for the dead were given out to soldiers. The mourning for the dead lasted a full 10 seconds.

Sungchul chewed on the tasteless but overly abundant food while sipping his drinks by himself. The night sky of the Demonic Battlefront had a reddish tint. It was because of the light emitted from the flames of hell that never went out.

“Status Window.”

He pulled up his status window that he hadn't seen in awhile. The unadjusted screen of the full status window overwhelmed his vision.

<'The one who Demolishes' Sungchul Kim's Status Window>

[Blessing]

Covenant

(Unknown)

Indomitable Spirit

(Immunity to Mental Attacks)

Blessing from the God of Chaos

(Strength, Dexterity, Vitality 10% increase)

Heir of Heracles

(+100 Power)

Bloodline of Berserkers

(Large amount of Healing when below 10% Vitality)

Champion of Humanity

(+50 Will)

Rapid Bow of the Kingdom of High Elves

(+30 Dexterity)

Heart of an Ancient Warrior

(+5 Strength, Resolve, Vitality / Resilience)

[Curse]

Covenant

(Unknown)

Final Declaration of Grand Mage Balzark

(-10 Intuition)

Blessing of Blademaster Karakardra

(+ 1 Dexterity, -1 Strength)

Ancient God's Champion, Arrak – Garr's Criticism

(-3 Strength)

Dark Dragon Groteus's Karmic Curse

(- 20 Strength, -20 Vitality)

Adelwight of the Haunted Forest's Common Curse

(- 5 Strength, Erectile Dysfunction)

Enemy of the Kingdom

(Faction: Nemesis of Human Kingdom, Blank Check Reward)

Destroyer of Hora Mountain Sect

(Faction: Nemesis of Hora Mountain Sect, Destroyed)

Destroyer of Mewra Sect

(Faction: Nemesis of Mewra Sect, Destroyed)

Enemy of the Coalition of Mages

(Faction: Nemesis of Coalition of Mages and affiliated guilds)

Steel Fist Curse of Crimson Orc Chief, Drakuul

(Race: -30 Orc Favor)

Recorded on Dwarven Log of Villains

(Race: -200 Dwarf Favor)

Recorded on Merchant Coalition Blacklist

(Faction: Trade impossible with Merchant coalition and their affiliated factions)

[Class]

Main Class – Primordial Warrior (Mythic)

Sub Class – Echo Mage (Legendary)

Sub Class – High Class Chef (Rare)

Sub Class – Alchemist (Rare)

[Stats]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Vitality 801 Magic Power 193

Intuition 173 Magic Resist 621

Resolve 502 Charisma 18

Luck 18

[Soul Contract – 6 Slots]

Soul Harvester

([Legend] Vitality Leech 15%, Vitality restored from fallen enemies)

Thunder Shield

([Legend] All Magic Damage reduced by 50% / Negate all mental attacks below legend rank)

Eye of Truth

([Legend] Negate all blessings below Epic rank / Identify all items, consumables, and skill details)

Soul Storage

([Epic] Can store 1500 different items)

Deceiver's Veil

([Rare – High Tier] Conceals status window)

– Blank –

[Weapon Proficiency]

Blunt Weapons – Max Proficiency

Sword – Master (85% until next level)

Axe – Expert (22% until next level)

Spear – Expert (18% until next level)

Bow – Master (82% until next level)

Polearm – Expert (11% until next level)

Staff – Veteran (44% until next level)

Unarmed – Grand Master

[Achievements – 592 in Total]

Member of the Original 500

First Warrior

Killer of Kobold Chief Garlagu

Veteran of the Battle of Avaron

588 more...

The status window was a type of epic; a memoir of the path an individual had taken during their life in the Other World. How many conflicts had he been involved in until now? Every single day he had experienced battles that would otherwise be called ‘a battle of a lifetime’ for anyone else. He received countless blessings, but also terrible curses. He was also hiding power that he could not yet reveal to the world.

‘I am a tool for my purpose.’

Sungchul’s eyes flashed a single time within the darkness. Deckard approached him in that instance. He plopped down onto the dirt beside Sungchul and spoke while staring off into the sky.

“Is Sarasa doing well?”

Sungchul nodded.

“That kid... how is she? Pretty?”

Sungchul was about to shake his head but nodded instead. Deckard, who hadn’t seen Sungchul’s hesitation, continued to look towards the sky while speaking with a voice wet with emotions.

“That kid... she was so much more beautiful before she took on that form. The entire school made a fuss whenever she was around, and her power was so strong that she broke that Soul Absorption Stone. That kid... she did something not even I could.”

Deckard looked happy as he spoke of his daughter, but he would undoubtedly grieve if he saw the current state of her changed face. Sungchul didn’t say anything.

“Anyways, you said you were a Former Returnee?”

Deckard changed topics. When Sungchul nodded, Deckard took a gulp of booze and spoke again.

“You’re in quite the rush. Seeing as you’ve come here of your own volition to harden yourself.”

“I could even go places rougher than this.”

“That’s quite the resolve.”

“Didn’t you also come here to grow stronger?”

Deckard nodded.

“That’s right. I came here seeking strength.”

“Because of the demon tribes?”

“That too, but there is also another reason.”

A meaningful smile formed on Deckard’s lips. He looked up into the rosy night sky and spoke again.

“According to a rumor, there is a dungeon around here created by an ancient magician. A dungeon filled with an unbelievable amount of magic power.”

“Who made this dungeon? The Seven Heroes perhaps?”

Deckard shook his head.

“This person existed before them. In the era of a calamity before the calamity resolved by the Seven Heroes. A forgotten age lost to time.”

“Quite interesting.”

The era of the Seven Heroes was even considered ancient, and barely any records remained. Their names were not being recorded properly, and only a handful of people remained with the correct knowledge of it. He was talking about something from a time before this. In other words, an individual from an unfathomably ancient and bygone era.

“I came to this place following its clues. It was one of the reasons I got sent to the Suicide Unit too. The Suicide Unit always operates on the front lines, but there is another benefit. It is a good place to cultivate your skills.”

“I agree.”

The demons were strong, and their numbers were endless. That meant that as long as you could survive, it was possible to drive yourself into life-or-death battles that tested your limits. The warrior class was meant to bloom within combat.

Sungchul had also cultivated his abilities on his own by slaughtering countless devils, and he continued to challenge himself with danger; trusting his stats as a foundation in order to steadily gain power that exceeded the limits of humanity. Deckard must have come to the same conclusion.

“Thanks to it I think I have reached a point where I can confidently say I am quite strong. It’s probably about time for me to challenge that place.”

“Where is that place?”

Deckard pointed to his feet in reply to Sungchul’s question with a smile on his face.

“It’s somewhere below here. It is a place called the Underground Kingdom from a forgotten era. Even I don’t know where the entrance is, but I have some threads I have yet to pull on.”

“The Underground Kingdom...”

It sounded familiar. At a distant past, there was a story of a group of people of the forgotten era that attempted to escape the calamity by digging underground and eventually forming their own kingdom. It felt like a story worthy of a good folklore or a bedtime story, but Deckard seemed to have discovered something.

“Now that winter is approaching, the demons will be attacking less frequently. Since you and I are both people constantly

thirsting for strength, why not go together to check it out sometime?”

He was a good person. He was good natured, but also very considerate. Sungchul judged him as such, but good people don't last long in the Other World. The demons ambushed the base within the cover of the night.

The demon's attack was easily repelled mostly due to Aaron's efforts, but he couldn't prevent casualties from occurring.

“....”

Deckard had received a critical wound and had fallen unconscious. Even Sungchul was helpless.

Important Note:

We had once said that there are two types of Reincarnators way back if you remember. One type are those who came back from the future to their past self with memory intact example Ahmuge.

The other type are the people who chose to return to Earth.

We realized that having the same term for each case would create confusion later on and so are going to use distinctive terms instead.

From now on People who choose to return to Earth will be called Returnees. These are people who in exchange for their skills and accomplishments choose to return to Earth.

The people who choose to return from the future to their past self like Ahmuge will be known as Regressors.

A Regression is returning to a former state and is much apter than the word Reincarnation which means rebirth in a new body. Many novels use the term Reincarnation for going back in time and hence we used it earlier since the readers were well aware of such a term. However, it is incorrect and its usage as going back in time to former self in novels is also incorrect. Regression is a superior word that is closer to the meaning and hence, we have chosen to go with Regressors.

Chapter 61 – Underground Kingdom (1)

Deckard's condition was serious. He overcame a critical point through emergency procedures performed with herbs that an elven man named Fagan had on him, but he still did not regain consciousness.

“He constantly pushed himself too far. Adequate rest is also necessary. He ran out of mana at a critical juncture again.”

Arkaard was beside Deckard when he was injured. It had been something he would have been able to take care of easily had he been able to use Glare, but his magic failed at a critical moment, and he was pushed into a corner which allowed him to be mortally wounded.

“The problem is the poison. The imp's weapons are coated with some dirty poison made by fermenting troll shit. We washed away all the poison, but some of it already made its way into Mr Deckard's body and ate away his vitality.”

Fagan, who was known to have fought the demons from a young age, accurately diagnosed Deckard's current condition. Sungchul also agreed with his assessment.

Sungchul immediately combed the ground in search of something. He found a plant that was growing along some rocks that appeared like a colposcope and grabbed a handful. The plant was named the Solitary Plant and is sometimes seen in this area. If the plant was ground and applied to the afflicted area, the imp's

poison could be neutralised to a certain extent. It was one of many useful things he picked while living on the Demonic Battlefield. The effect was mediocre at best, but at a place like this with no doctors or priest, herbs like this were worth its weight in gold.

“You’re just going to use it like that?”

As he was preparing to pound it with a pestle, Bertelgia popped out wanting to speak. Sungchul nodded in response, and Bertelgia rebuked him.

“You’re going to reduce its efficacy like that, and you don’t even know what kind of side-effects it might have. Why not act like an alchemist and apply your skills to solve the problem?”

Bertelgia was giving such luxurious advice in such dire times when every second counted, but as he thought on her words a bit more, it did have some rationality to it. People have said, “When you’re in a rush, take a step back.” Sungchul checked on Deckard’s condition once again. It looked like he could hold on for a moment longer.

He left the barracks again and took a whiff of the Solitary Plant. Alchemic information relating to the Solitary Plant appeared before him.

< Thousand Year Solitary Plant >

Level: 3

Grade: B

Attribute: Wood

Effect: Detoxification, Damage Poison

Note: A perennial plant found on rocky mountains near the Demonic Realm. It has a neutralisation effect due to the influence from the Demonic Realm. However, it is also poisonous itself so take care during usage.

“There is also poison in the Solitary Plant.”

Sungchul had used the Solitary Plant many times, but he wasn't aware that the plant itself contained poison. It was because the plant was relatively rare, and its distinct smell prevented it from being used as anything else other than medicine.

“Of course. It is a plant growing off the radiating Demonic Energy from the Demonic Realm. It wouldn't be able to survive without producing toxins to protect itself. It's a characteristic shared by all the flora growing in this region next to the Demonic Realm.”

This meant that there was a need to neutralise the poison. Sungchul brought out the Soul Storage and began to lay out the alchemic ingredients that had been gathered over time as he contemplated on a solution.

He was most confident with using what he had always used:

Blind Man's Grass. It felt as though the Blind Man's Grass, with its similar wood attribute, would be most suitable when used with the Solitary Plant. However, Bertelgia landed on his hand as he reached for the Blind Man's Grass and spun side to side.

“Nu-uh!”

“... what are you doing?”

“Don't look for the easiest path; think a bit harder.”

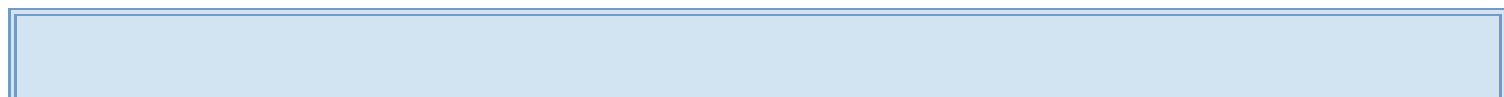
“Think about what?”

“Don't just think about extracting the poison, but look at the situation in its entirety. The characteristics of the poison inside Mr Deckard for example.”

“You mean the troll shit poison?”

“Yep. Isn't that ultimately what you're trying to detoxify?”

Pitchforks with troll shit smeared on them were lying all over the ground. Sungchul grabbed one and took a whiff to check. He then began heaving from the atrocious stench, but he could see the alchemic information regarding the shit poison appearing before his eyes.



[Troll's Faeces(Northern)]

Level: 3

Grade: A

Attribute: Metal

Effects: None

Note: According to Legend, these Northern Trolls were raised like cattle by a now an extinct kingdom of an avian race. This avian race used the faeces for several different uses, but one of them was gathering it to form metal. Keep in mind that the sense of smell of this avian race was not well developed!

Reading the note, something clicked in Sungchul's mind.

“The troll shit has traces of rusted metal.”

Bertelgia's body shook up and down.

“Mm-hmm. That's exactly it!”

Solitary Plant. Blind Man's Grass. Troll shit. He looked at these conflicting ingredients, then turned his attention to his other ingredients.

Alchemic items had a total of 5 attributes: Fire, Water, Wood, Metal, and Null. Other than the null attribute that only exists in theory, everything in alchemy existed in between these four

attributes. It was a complex system where fire overpowered wood and metal, and water overpowered fire and metal. However, water was weak to wood. Even so, the system doesn't have too strict of a rule; thus the strength of each attribute could change by its concentration.

Sungchul focused on removing the metal attribute of the troll shit. A fire attribute alchemic item that could suppress the metal attribute was needed, but to overpower the metal attribute, the fire attribute must be powerful. However, he didn't have any fire attribute item that could easily subdue the metal attribute. The only alchemic item in his possession with enough impact to overpower the metal attribute contained wood attribute. It was the porous seeds of the Firework Tree that he used to create the Alchemic Bomb (Darkness) at Airfruit.

“Mmm...”

Sungchul let out a groan as he continued to brush the fuzzy seeds. Bertelgia who was watching him from the side thought to herself.

‘This guy... he has talent. To find the answer among all those ingredients... Is it intuition or is it luck?’

Bertelgia wanted to let him think on it a bit longer, but she also knew that there wasn't much time. She threw out another piece of advice.

“Attributes can change for certain items if you process it.”

“So that was the case.”

Sungchul’s eyes lit up. It was a refreshing feeling as though a fog had lifted as soon as he heard her advice. His movements were quick, but he carefully trimmed each seed with great care and attention. That aspect was also a ‘plus’ in Bertelgia’s eyes.

‘As expected. He definitely has talent.’

The ability to exercise this level of leisure even in the middle of a crisis was considered a part of someone’s gift in alchemy. It wasn’t just an insult to say that the lazy and half-assed could never be an alchemist. Sungchul, who was pruning each seed, began to pound the seeds with a pestle and synthesised a bright red powder from his alchemic cauldron with a couple of additional ingredients.

< Essence of Porous Seed >

Level: 3

Grade: B

Attribute: Fire

Type: Explosive

Effect: Ingredient for Explosives. Handle with Care.

He succeeded in converting the wood attribute into fire attribute. Sungchul looked at the ingredients in his possession once again: Solitary Plant, Blind Man’s Grass, Essence of Porous Seed.

The recipe hadn't been given to him, but the vague idea of how the alchemic item would form appeared in his mind. The experience he had gathered and the knowledge he accumulated were applied to his creativity, which led to a creation of his own.

He immediately began working with controlled haste. He added the concentrate he gathered from the crushed Solitude Plant to distilled water. He then boiled the mixture to evaporate the water. Finally, he filtered the mixture through a filter leaving only the concentrate on it. It wasn't something anyone had taught him. He applied the process of synthesising wood attribute items verbatim to this item. This was meant to remove the impurities and retain only the concentrate with the desired components.

Sungchul added the Blind Man's Grass to the cauldron and boiled it to create a separate counteragent, then added the Solitude Plant concentrate and the Essence of Porous Seed to the mixture. He hesitated regarding the amount of Porous Seed Essence to add.

“For that, it's fine to just add a little bit.”

Bertelgia gave her input at the critical moment, and Sungchul began to add a minute amount as though he was flavouring a dish with salt with a faint smile on his face. Finally came the synthesis. He stirred his mixture within the alchemic cauldron and obtained a result after a considerable time had passed.

[Synthesis Success!]

It was a reward befitting the effort. However, there was more to his reward than he thought.

[You have successfully produced an alchemic Item without anyone's teaching through personal experience and knowledge as foundation.]

[Great Alchemists have no use for recipes.]

Reward: +10 Magic Power , +15 Intuition

Unexpected words along with a strange light that burst forth from Bertelgia's body was drawn to Sungchul's body like steel to a magnet.

“Bertelgia, what is this?”

Sungchul looked directly at her as he asked his question.

“That is one of the trials of the Creationist. I did help out a bit though...”

“....”

It wasn't a simple trial. Sungchul recognised that the new strength that entered his body did indeed come from Bertelgia's

body. It was similar to the instance in the basement of House of Recollections with the Baal. He felt uncomfortable about it, but there was a more important matter at hand. He checked the item produced within the cauldron.

< Antidote >

Level: 3

Grade: A

Attribute: Fire

Type: Medicine

Effect: Cures poison. Specialises in poisons with the Metal attribute.

It was the appropriate item. It had even received an A grade.

“Wow! It’s even an A grade?! Even though it was the first recipe you created.”

Bertelgia shook her body within his pocket. Sungchul immediately grabbed the antidote and entered the barracks. Aakard and Fagan were caring for Deckard inside.

“Could I have a moment?”

Sungchul excused himself and approached Deckard.

“What is that?”

Aakard saw that Sungchul held something in his hand, and asked bluntly.

“It is the medicine that will save this man.”

Sungchul popped open the antidote and poured the antidote over the wound on Deckard’s neck. Deckard let out a loud moan in pain.

“Mmm....”

Arkaard’s eyes were no longer friendly, but Fagan held him back from the side. Instead, he shot out a question in a frosty tone.

“What is this made of?”

Sungchul didn’t give him a glance as he answered the question.

“1000 years Solitude Plant.”

Fagan nodded. Arkaard also nodded but made another rebuke.

“If you use the Solitude Plant now, Deckard won’t be able to hold on for much longer. Did you know that Solitude Plant has poison?”

“This is made after removing that poison.”

Sungchul opened Deckard’s mouth and had him drink the antidote. He spat out most of it, but a few drops had been swallowed. After a few moments, the fever finally subsided. Another critical moment had been passed safely.

The demon race goes into seclusion during the winter because demons are weak against the cold. Of course, the high ranking demons would not suffer from a slight chill but their minions were affected. The low ranking demons that would form the bulk of the demonic army could not endure the cold, and so they had to remain in their posts. A brief peace took place on the Demonic Battlefield during the long winters as the demons were not a race known for taking the initiative.

The Suicide Unit was no exception. They received no further attacks from the demons after receiving significant damage from the ambush last week. Even the patrols that made the rounds reported back that the demons had returned to their fire and ice covered homeland.

Sungchul took this peaceful moment to roam about the rocky mountains of the Demonic Battlefield on his own. He was seeking the entrance to the Underground Kingdom that was supposed to exist around these parts. Deckard, who was sent to the rear, gave him a bit of information. Deckard told him that the entrance to the Underground Kingdom existed on the rugged rocky mountains where the Realm of Demons and Humans met.

He had said that the location would reveal itself during an eclipse, but there were still two months to go until the next eclipse. Sungchul didn't have the luxury of waiting out that long. This was the reason that he was turning the rocky mountain upside down by himself. He continued spending his days eliminating the disparate mobs of demons he met with magic as he roamed until he saw an unusual scene. A ship that navigated the skies, a single sky cruiser, leisurely travelled across the skies of the Demonic Battlefront.

‘It's not a ship from the Human Empire. Is that flag of the Ancient Kingdom?’

The Ancient Kingdom. It was a militaristic nation steeped in rich history that was known to be the longest living human nation on the continent. They view the usage of magic as unjust, and thus strictly forbid its usage. Instead, they systematically developed people to the peak of sword mastery and used them as the main force. They were existences known as Sword Masters. These Sword Masters, all with skills on par with Aaron Genghis, was what allowed the Ancient Kingdom to retain their place as a powerful nation even in the centre of the continent. However, Sungchul knew that they secretly utilised magicians despite their outward taboo of magic.

A party of people descended from the Ancient Kingdom's Airship. They were a small party of 13. Sungchul noticed that half of them were magicians with a single glance.

‘What is an Ancient Kingdom Airship doing in a place like this?’

The mystery was resolved before long. A female mage in command five homunculi beneath her feet stood over a fissure in the rocks and recited a spell. The fissure opened, and a cave that opened downwards like a well revealed itself.

Chapter 62 – Underground Kingdom (2)

A foreboding region opened up beneath the entrance that was facing the sky. There was an airship in the air, and Ancient Kingdom soldiers were guarding the entrance. And if that wasn't enough, a portion of the magicians had set up a barrier there as well.

Sungchul patiently watched their movements. When the sun had set, people were seen crawling out of the dark hole through a lift operated by a crank. There were ten people when they descended, but only seven came out, and one of them had severe injuries that required him to lean on his companions.

“Shit. There are too many monsters. We'll need an army and not an exploratory team at this rate.”

A youth with an attractive height and a healthy physique spoke as he wiped his blade soaked in blood. The gloomy female mage next to him stood beside him like a shadow.

“Didn't I say it before? We'll need at least five Sword Masters before we can break through the area.”

There were five homunculi around her skirt that reached down to her feet, wearing metal masks armed to the teeth.

“Our strength isn't enough, see?”

“Bring more Sword Masters, you!”

“Lady Mimi’s assessment are absolute, always!”

The five homunculi began to shout as they hopped about distractingly. At that moment, a man descended from the airship above.

There were several dozens of meters of distance between the airship and the ground, but he had jumped off with no hesitation. The ground tremored lightly with a boom! sound; which caused all heads to turn toward him.

“Scout Leader. Mimi Azrael! Report the status of your progress.”

It was a gray-haired Swordsman with a mane and a full beard that was similar to that of a lion’s. The full plate armor that covered his entire body was adorned with white gold, and the man appeared to be of great status. Sungchul instantly recognized the man’s face.

‘It’s Willie Gilford.’

A man that took a spot among the 13 Champions of the Continent. He was hero number 7: Willie Gilford. He was the very first Sword Master among the summoned and had gained great renown throughout the continent through his overwhelming mastery over the sword and his fighting spirit of a lion’s.

Of course, he was Sungchul's acquaintance. They were together in the battle against the Devil King on the Demonic Realm frontlines. They never shared many words with each other, but Sungchul knew that he was a meticulous strategist despite his magnanimous appearance.

The gloomy woman called Mimi looked at him with depressed eyes and answered him calmly.

"As you can see, we lost half of the exploratory squad."

"Cause?" Willie spoke as he stroked his sideburns.

"There were too many enemies. Your Majesty added a Sword Master and 5 Sword Adepts to our unit, but their strength was lacking."

Willie raised his hand, interrupting Mimi, then turned toward the young man and spoke in a growl.

"Mikhael Gilford. Is what she says true?"

The young swordsman named Mikhael looked blankly with a dark expression, then nodded.

"A lot was omitted, but what the witch says is overall the truth."

The youth's voice and appearance were similar to William's.

Sungchul could now recognize Mikhael as Willie's son. A fire lit in his eyes.

‘That’s right. You fuckers must have called it quits because you didn’t get affected by the curse.’

He could still recall the scene clearly. People believed that the Thirteen Champions of the Continent did nothing, and recorded history reflects the fact that the gathering of the Thirteen Champions had remained idle. However, the truth was different.

The Thirteen Champions of the Continent had joined the invasion into the Demonic Realm. They had also managed to force their way through the Demon King Max Hesthnus's Palace reaching his chamber. If they had torn the door open and entered at that time, the first Calamity would have ended right then. But then a conflict of interest occurred at that moment. Someone spoke up.

“After we kill the Demon King, the Seven Heroes will appear once again. Can we handle the Seven Heroes? What about the next Calamity after we manage to kill them?”

That one line of questioning ruined everything. Sungchul still remembered the face of the woman that had asked the question.

The Second Hero of the Continent and the Master of the Floating Isles, Moderator Aquiroa.

Above all else, he tried to kill the old woman himself, but her Floating Isles was a hidden location under a veil of secrets. He didn't know the location nor could he find it despite all of his efforts. He had tried many times to determine its location, but it was all for naught. Time passed by as Sungchul was deep in thought.

“Have your men set up camp and remain on standby. I'll gather all the experts near my area and add them to the unit.”

Willie spoke in a booming voice. Mimi didn't show much of a reaction, but Mikhael rose up in protest.

“Father, wasn't this plan supposed to progress in secret? There is a concern that the secret might leak if we bring in outsiders carelessly.”

“There is no concern. Dead men tell no tales.”

Willie pulled his blade from its sheath. A strange blue light poured from the blade. Sungchul who saw this scene thought to himself.

‘He never steps up himself at all costs.’

At Willie's strength, it would be possible to clean up whatever was underground with ease. However, he was too paranoid to involve himself in such matters. Willie only fought battles that were assured of being a victory. It was this mentality that had lost

him countless opportunities but allowed him to never fall into dire straits.

“I’ll return after a week. Set up camp here and defend this location.”

He left most of the guards with the camp at the entrance of the cave and took the airship heading southwards. Whether from whim or with intent, he peeked towards the ridge that Sungchul was hiding in. However, it would have been impossible to find Sungchul who had completely suppressed his presence.

“Was it a fluke? It felt extremely ominous.”

The airship disappeared from his sight, and Sungchul returned to observing the camp.

The female mage named Mimi entered her own barracks with her homunculi and Mikhael took a rest sharing conversation with his subordinates. The airship had left, but the barrier was still formidable, and there were Empathomancy magicians stationed that could make contact with the outside at any time.

Sungchul felt tempted to step out personally, but he resisted the temptation. There was still plenty of time left. There was no need to overexert himself. Also, the second of the two roll calls of the day was fast approaching. Missing a roll call was considered desertion. Aaron that everyone feared was no real match for Sungchul, but Sungchul wanted to stay active within the Suicide Unit for awhile. He sighed in regret and left the scene.

When he returned, the military tent was in an uproar. Three soldiers were tied down to a rack and were being flogged by Aaron. Sungchul could recognize one of them as one of the five that had deserted during the battle. It wasn't a wise choice to desert in the frontlines of the Demonic Realm. Different from the regions of the rear, deserting the Suicide Unit who were at the forefront of the Demonic frontline meant surviving in the Demon Realm with nothing but their bodies to rely on.

It wasn't easy to surviving in this land teeming with evil creatures in all directions. They would most likely die or disappear after wandering these barren lands, and even if they did manage to adjust, they would have to lead the life of a primitive animal. Sungchul managed to eat and live freely because of his strength; other ordinary people equated the Demonic Realm with death.

“You traitors had forsaken your brothers in arms to save yourselves. You have added a heavy crime on top of the crimes you've already committed. I cannot forgive you, and thus I will kill you to appease the grievances of the spirits of warriors long gone.”

Aaron flogged the three constrained deserters toward the brink of death. However, they did not die. An unexpected guest arrived as they were about to meet their end; the reinforcements from the south. There were about 300 in all.

According to rumors, there was a mass desertion that occurred along the battlefield supervised by the Order of the Iron Blood

Knights, and so a portion of them had been sent here. Sungchul eyed one of them and tossed over a warm drink when the time was appropriate.

“Why did the massive desertion happen?”

“Max Hesthnius. The Demon King came out personally on the battlefield.”

The new recruit trembled with fear etched into his face. It all made sense if he was telling the truth. According to the man, Max led an elite army composed of the strongest devils and demons and attacked the forward base to the west operated by the Order of the Iron Blood Knights. They burned 30% of the fortification to the ground, and after a drawn out battle, the Iron Blood Knights suffered a harsh defeat.

The Order of the Iron Blood Knights, who were one of the key players in holding the front line against the Demonkind, were losing control of the battle line they were in charge of.

They were in no immediate danger since the hibernation period had begun, but it would be difficult to hold the line in spring due to having already lost all of their strongholds

“An unfortunate rumor is spreading around.”

After roll call, Sungchul heard about the rumor spreading around the unit from Arkaard.

“Marquess Martin Breggas is preparing a joint force to reinforce the Order of the Iron Blood Knights.”

This was nothing more than a death sentence for the Suicide Unit if the rumors were true due to the fact that the unit was meant to be sent to the bleakest and most dangerous of missions. But this was good news for Sungchul since Deckard, his source of information, was safe in the rear and Sungchul had no one to worry about but himself. Sungchul was also planning on clearing the dungeon defended by the exploration team within a week, no matter who or what awaited within.

The main problem was that the entrance was guarded by the explorers from the Ancient Kingdom, but Sungchul had a solution for even this.

The next day, Sungchul left the rowdy unit behind him and headed into the Demon Realm. There he challenged one of the Demon Lords and escaped after pretending to lose.

Excited at the idea that he defeated the man responsible for reducing Hesthnius Max to spirit form and put him on the run, the Demon Lord gathered his army to give chase. Sungchul had thousands of demons at his tail as he fled toward the exploratory unit's camp. What happened next was obvious.

The demons that had hounded Sungchul discovered the Exploratory unit and attacked. Sungchul hid in a ravine out of view and watched the scene with a potato as a snack. Sungchul

believed that the exploratory would simply retreat, but they chose the other option. Instead of abandoning the dungeon and escaping, they opted to enter the known danger that was the dungeon. The demons did not give chase. The high ranking demons looked once at the entrance, shook their heads, then retreated their army.

“This is the grounds of a race who were tributed to the gods as a sacrifice. We will only share their fate if we follow in.”

The demons fell back, and Sungchul felt great curiosity once again. He felt drawn to this dungeon that had caused even the demons to shake their heads and retreat. However, he chose to fall back again. He chose to head toward the south toward the field hospital that Deckard was committed to and snuck in.

“What is the identity of that dungeon?”

Sungchul asked. He even told Deckard that the entrance of the dungeon was already discovered by the Ancient Kingdom’s scouts and was being actively explored. When Deckard heard the story, he could hide the truth no longer.

“What did you say? The Ancient Kingdom’s scouts already arrived? Shit...!”

He then spilled everything he knew.

“The dungeon is actually the land of a race eaten up by a Calamity.”

“A race eaten up by a Calamity?”

“Races which succumb to the Calamities are enslaved by the Gods. In the case of the ancestors that constructed the underground kingdom, they became the slaves of the Ancient God.”

“The slaves of the Ancient God...”

Deep wrinkles formed in Sungchul’s brow.

There were five main gods within the Other World’s Pantheon. The God of Order that was in charge of the sun and righteousness. The God of Chaos that sought evil and entropy. The God of Mediation that maintained the world as it was. The Ancient God which was the manifestation of the eternal flow of time. Finally, the prearranged deity that was not yet born. It was known that the Ancient God was the most incomprehensible among all of these deities. Sungchul had once fought against the attendants of the Ancient God. They were revolting and twisted existences that he never wanted to see again.

Chapter 63 – Underground Kingdom (3)

The day passed. The Suicide Unit was put on high alert in response to the reports of the overall movements of the Devil Army. Aaron gathered the members of the unit to speak.

“All of you know this, that an unexpected army of demons has begun moving southward. According to the Gryphon scouts, the demons have retreated but the possibility of them preparing an ambush can’t be ignored. We need scouts. I am looking for volunteers.”

It wasn’t easy to look for volunteers in a unit composed mostly of new recruits. Aaron naturally looked towards the veteran members. Sungchul raised his hand.

“Number 34? Aren’t you a greenhorn as well?”

Sungchul shook his head.

“I am better than that. I have also been exploring the vicinity every day anyways. You can leave this to me.”

“You sure?”

There was no reason to hold someone back from volunteering. Aaron assigned Sungchul as a scout then looked for soldiers to support him, but no one stepped up. It was because all the soldiers knew the truth that demons never cleanly retreated in the

demonic battlefield. They might have left behind countless traps or ambushes in wait, or even some man-eating demonic beast might be lurking around. It was one thing if the whole army moved, but for a small patrolling party, they would easily become prey to some demonic beast or become a demon's plaything.

“If you successfully patrol the area once, I'll count it as a successful mission. Anyone willing to step up?”

Genghis put out an offer that no one in the Suicide Unit could scoff at, but even still, no one volunteered, showing the risk this mission carried.

In the silence, Sungchul spoke to Aaron once again.

“It's enough with me alone. I'll be back in 3 days. If not, then consider me dead.”

“Well, I don't plan on reducing your number of missions because you volunteered. Is that ok with you?”

Aaron spoke with a dirty grin on his flat face. Sungchul nodded in return.

“Well... It'll be all the same if I die patrolling, right?”

“You know very well. Ok. Go on then, Number 34.”

Sungchul was given a signalling scroll along with some rations and water before he headed out.

‘Looks like I won’t need to join roll call for three days. I don’t know what the scale of that dungeon is, but I should be able to determine its value within three days.’

Sungchul immediately left and headed towards the dungeon. There were a lot of traps and patrols around the dungeon as expected. Sungchul avoided detection and traps as he snuck his way towards his destination.

Wham!

He bashed a mob of devils lying in ambush with a pebble, then looked below the rocky mountain. There were only barracks lying abandoned around the dungeon with no traces of human life. The barrier that had been cast everywhere was also shattered and had long since lost its effectiveness. Fortunately, the pulley system operating within the dungeon was still quite active. Unfortunately, there was no way the demons would simply pass it by. They had left behind a devious little trick on the machine. Anyone who operated the machine would be caught in an explosion.

“...”

Sungchul didn’t lay a finger on the trap. He jumped down the bleak hole with just his body instead. Utter darkness swallowed him completely as the sensation of falling that numbed his feet pervaded throughout his body. Sungchul could see a faint light

within the darkness and threw his fists toward it.

Boom!

The hard rock crumbled like tofu as half his arm was embedded into it causing his body to become fixed onto the rock wall. Sungchul pulled it out and leaped toward the bright light, which led him into a corridor with no end in sight.

The faded rock wall stained with dirt and green lichen combined together to create a dark atmosphere and a musky smell that could only be found in a charnel house pierced his nose.

“This place... I don’t like it.”

Bertelgia trembled within his pocket, so Sungchul opened it and spoke.

“From this point, you don’t have to stay inside the pocket.”

As soon as he finished speaking, Bertelgia popped out of his pocket and flew around vigorously as she regained her normal size.

“Ah~ I wanted this feeling to be more refreshing than it is!”

“Do you know where this place is?”

Bertelgia shook her head at his question.

“Nope. This is my first time here, but I do have information about the Nahak that you guys call the birdmen.”

“Nahak? What’s that?”

“They are a race that flourished in the Other World in the past but are all extinct now, so you can’t find them anymore. Still, according to legend, they had massive wings which they used to soar the skies and used their beaks engraved with runic letters to control destructive magic at will.”

“Are they a different race than the birdmen that can be found in the demonic army?”

“I think they might be a distant cousin? The Nahak aren’t this shoddy.”

As Bertelgia shared her story, Sungchul entered the dungeon one step at a time. There were traces of the exploratory squad all around. Sungchul carefully took each step as he looked at his surroundings. The Eye of Truth observed a magical existence far beyond in the darkness. It was a magic trap. One of a frost attribute. Anyone that accidentally steps on it would be overwhelmed by a chill that would freeze the entire body.

‘This was done by a human magician.’

Footprints were scattered all around the trap. It appeared as though there was a huge commotion here. According to the number of footprints, there looked to be about thirty humans within the dungeon. It was a combined number of both the exploratory squad and the troops prepared for defence. Sungchul continued on.

He could see blood stains. He followed them to find two corpses lying about on the floor. They were the corpses of soldiers. The group must have met a difficult enemy as they couldn't even observe the proper formality for their dead comrades. Sungchul glared as he continued on, leaving the corpses behind.

“An enemy.”

Bertelgia spoke briefly. Sungchul sensed the lingering hostility lurking not too far away. With Fal Garaz gripped in his hand, he glared at the existence standing in the darkness and spoke curtly.

“Crawl out.”

Finally, something revealed itself in the darkness. It was a monster with a human body and the skull of a bird with an endless stream of green pus flowing down its skin. It had no eyes or nose, but it acted as though it was looking at Sungchul. As though it was a normal person. Sungchul knew exactly what it was.

‘It’s a servant of the Ancient God.’

It wasn't an opponent that he couldn't overcome, but it was one that he'd rather not fight. He swung his hammer and spoke briefly.

“Get lost.”

“...”

The stony creature stood blankly while looking at Sungchul before disappearing silently into the darkness.

“Just what is that?”

Bertelgia who had been hiding behind Sungchul slowly popped out with a question.

“It's a Despair of the Abyss.’

“A Despair of the Abyss?”

Sungchul nodded.

“When it meets an existence weaker than itself, it tries to drag its victim into its pit regardless of whether the victim is a human or a demon.”

And even the dead. A deathly stillness surrounded anywhere a Despair of the Abyss claimed as its own.

“Uuu... it’s scarier because I think I know what you mean.”

Bertelgia trembled once again.

“Do you think the soldiers before were this guy’s doing?”

“Unlikely. Anyone that a Despair of the Abyss drags away is erased from existence. Not even a corpse would be left behind.”

“Does that mean there are other monsters here too?”

Sungchul nodded as he began to think.

‘The power in my body must have lured this creature. It shouldn’t have revealed itself to the exploratory squad.’

Sungchul remembered the report that they gave to Willie, if they had run into a Despair of the Abyss, none of them would have been left to tell the tale. Sungchul recalled what a nightmarish existence the things called Despair of the Abyss truly were. Even though they weren’t a match for his current self.

Sungchul continued forth. He continued to discover more corpses of soldiers. One corpse. Two corpses. Then ten corpses. Sungchul could find traces of a fierce battle around each corpse: singe marks from magical flames, carved out walls where a Sword Master’s sword aura would have sliced through, and splinters of

shattered spears strewn about the floor. However, he couldn't find even a single trace of whatever the opposing monster might be. It was truly a strange occurrence. In cases of such large scale battles, it would be normal to see at least a clue about the opposing side.

“...”

Sungchul stopped hiding his presence. He pulled out a torch from his Soul Storage, lit it, then began walking in loud footsteps. Surprisingly, he could hear some rustling noise in his surroundings soon after. He could see the teeming mass of monsters beyond the darkness. Two legs and both arms, also a pair of wings. Altogether, it was a disfigured corpse of an avian that walked on six legs.

“....”

The avian corpse crawled up silently like a centipede and leaped toward Sungchul. Its head with its lifeless eyes began to peck him fiercely. Sungchul's Fal Garaz split the air.

Wham!

When the avian corpse was struck with the destructive blow from Fal Garaz, it disintegrated into dust. Sungchul finally discovered why there were no corpses of the monsters.

‘The musky smell resembling a charnel house must be from the disintegrated corpses.’

Dozens of Avian corpses began to crawl around like centipedes as they carefully eyed Sungchul.

“Uu! I wanna go back!”

Bertelgia hid in Sungchul’s pocket. Sungchul’s hammer flew with more vigour.

Wham! Wham! Wham!

The grotesque spirits were no match for him. They turned to dust, and the remaining spirits fled into the darkness. Stillness returned to the dungeon.

When the battle ended, Bertelgia left the pocket once more and opened herself up to a page.

“What’s that?”

A simple map that looked as though it was drawn hurriedly with a pen appeared on the page.

“I tried making a map.”

“A map?”

“Yep. This dungeon... it doesn’t look small.”

Sungchul agreed with her on this point, but there was a secret method that could allow him to easily break through this maze.

Wham!

An opposing wall crumbled and a large hole formed within it. Beyond the wall, there was another corridor. Sungchul walked across the corridor, then swung at another wall. He continued this process until the end of the dungeon appeared.

“Mmm...”

Bertelgia, who had spent some effort in drawing a map on one of her pages, let out a sigh.

“It’s quite handy if you’re strong... huh?”

“...”

Sungchul fixed his grip on the hammer, then turned directions toward the north and began his excavation once again. When a total of four walls were smashed, he stood before a cliff. The pit surrounded in darkness was shrouded in an indeterminate green fog that obstructed his vision of the other side.

Sungchul tossed down a rock and listened for a sound. It was

quite a deep pit. He thought as such and turned to a different direction.

“What’s so great about making holes like this?”

Bertelgia spat out a question.

“I’m making my own path. It’s too easy to lose your way in a maze like this.”

If there was no path, make one. It was Sungchul’s method of solving dungeons. Also, making this kind of a ruckus would draw out existences hidden within the dungeon without forcing him to seek them out.

‘Clack’

Before long, he could feel another presence. It was the presence of humans. Sungchul put away Fal Garaz into his Soul Storage and waited for the group of humans to arrive. Beyond the darkness, a female magician surrounded by a translucent fog appeared before him. There were five armor-clad homunculi around her feet. Sungchul was already aware of her presence, but he pretended not to have noticed and continued to stare ahead.

She took some time to observe him. His appearance, attire, equipment, and even his stats. She checked everything that could be secretly observed. After a complete inspection, the female magician removed her magical veil and revealed herself.

“Who are you?”

Asked Mimi Azrael. The leader of the exploratory squad.

Chapter 64 – Those Who Swallowed The Nahak (1)

Mimi had the outward appearance of a woman in her mid-20s. The gleam of her cold blue staring eyes was visible under the hood she wore over her head.

She raised her staff.

“I’ll ask again. Who are you?”

“Number 34.”

Sungchul pointed toward the cloth number that was attached to his coat. Mimi did not truly understand the meaning behind the number.

“I see. Mr. 34. Ok. How did you get here?”

Mimi looked towards Bertelgia who was flying about behind Sungchul.

“Ms Mimi! She is flying about~yeyo! It’s amazing~yeyo!”

“That’s called a familiar, yeyo. Don’t flap your lips if you’re ignorant~yeyo!”

The homunculi that had been playing about beneath her skirt grew rowdy. When she lifted her staff, The homunculi lowered their head and immediately quieted down. Azrael looked at Sungchul again with an interrogating glare as order returned to the dungeon.

“Now. Your answer is?”

Sungchul looked at her without any trace of hesitation as he answered her in a firm voice.

“...I am currently investigating what is inside this dungeon.”

When she heard his reply, she revealed a cold smile.

“Big balls on this one. I don’t know where you herald from, but I advise you to retreat from here within a week.”

“For what reason?”

“The Seventh Champion of the Continent. Willie Gilford is on his way here.”

“...”

Nothing would change whether he was here or not, but Sungchul remained silent.

Mimi looked over at the hole created by Sungchul.

“What is this? Did you perhaps do that?”

Sungchul neither admitted it nor denied it.

“A living book type familiar... you appear to be a magician.”

She had already looked over his stats through the translucent fog. It wasn't anything impressive. It was why she chose to reveal herself without anyone to support her.

“What's it to you whether I'm a magician or not?”

Sungchul finally spoke. Mimi looked at Sungchul with a chilling glare before turning around with a nod.

“Chief Investigator Ujira. Use the veil.” she said to one of the homunculi.

Mimi and the five homunculi were then surrounded by an invisible fog which removed them from sight.

“I'll warn you again, but it's to your benefit to leave quickly. There are mighty Sword Masters here as well, then in a week's time...”

She let her words intermingled with hostile intent linger in the air as she disappeared into the darkness. However, Sungchul had the Eye of Truth within his Soul Contract. The figures of Mimi and her five homunculi veiled by the invisible fog reappeared into his sights.

“...”

Sungchul hid his presence and quietly tailed Mimi.

She walked along silently like a cat before arriving at a specific area. It was an empty plot that was surrounded by hastily made fortifications. There were about fifteen soldiers and members of the exploratory squad catching their breath.

“Ugh...”

There were quite a bit of injured left. One of the soldiers was muttering something to himself as he punched the air. Perhaps he had been critically wounded. He was gradually dying by himself in a dark corner as even the magician tending to him had given up. Mimi took off her invisible veil at this point.

“One human died~yeyo!”

“People who bully us getting what they deserve~yeyo!”

The calmed homunculi began to grow rowdy once again.

“Ms Mimi already suggested abandoning the ruins and retreating, but why are these humans so stupid as to ignore her advice~yeyo?”

“At least the day that we become true fairies are arriving sooner due to that~yeyo!”

Annoying voices poured out in all directions from the empty plot. It was at that moment

“Can’t you shut up?!”

One man suddenly shouted. It was Willie Gilford’s son, Mikhael Gilford. The confident youth with an elegant armor that was fitted to his form made his way towards Mimi with anger on his face.

“How many times do I have to tell you to muzzle those fucking Homunculi? Hm? What are you going to do if those monstrous creatures show up again, you damned witch.”

“... Your voice seems to be quite a bit louder?”

Mimi didn’t show any change in her expression even in the face of Mikhael that had engaged her so aggressively. Mikhael glared at her response as though he wanted to tear her apart with his bare teeth for a long while before chewing on his lips and taking practice swings with his sword.

“This was why we shouldn’t have brought a fucking witch! Garbage that uses taboo magic should have always be cut down with a blade!”

“If you cut me down, you might as well put an end to this scouting mission. I’m the only one that knows the way.”

Mikhael’s face twisted a degree further. It was then a man stepped up to hold him back. The man in his forties with a large scar across his face was in a servant’s attire that didn’t suit his solemn expression.

“Young master, there is no good that will come out of this anger.”

“Mmm... Old man Ord.”

Surprisingly, Mikhael looked as though his anger had washed away as the man stepped in. He had an unnaturally rapid change of heart as he looked back toward Mimi with a refreshing smile as he offered her an apology.

“I was in the wrong, Scout Leader. It looks as though the tense situation made me lose control of my temper. It was immature of me.”

Mimi heard his apology, yet made no reaction to it. She instead made a report on her scouting mission with a frozen expression as

though she was looking at an inanimate object.

“...I’ll give you my scouting report.”

Mikhael leaned onto a rock as he nodded.

“When I arrived at the source of the noise, I ran across what appeared to be a male human mage.”

“A human? His affiliations?”

Mikhael looked surprised and quickly made his inquiry.

“I can’t determine his affiliations. He called himself number 34. However, he was dressed like a beggar in a pitiful attire of a summoned. He also had a living book familiar.”

“A living book, eh? What a rare type. How is his strength? Is he up to a mid-grade magician?”

“I did peek at his stats, but it wasn’t outstanding. However, I can’t discount the possibility that he might be disguising his stats. It could also be some devil disguised as a human.”

“Devils don’t come to this place. They can’t come here. It is a place crawling with their natural predators.” said Mikhael with a smile.

“I tried to look around for his companions but found nothing.”

The report ended here. Mikael made a gesture for Mimi to stand down before he gathered his subordinates and personal servant to discuss.

“Another explorer. Who do you think sent him?”

“There shouldn’t be any new developments regarding the Underground Kingdom. We should consider all possibilities. It is most likely that he’s from the Human Empire, but we can’t discount the Kingdom of Etteria. No one is more thirsty of magic than the elves.”

“But, if they can find that, they should be able to produce a monster on the level of the Enemy of the World.”

Sungchul, who was quietly hiding in the darkness, eavesdropped on their conversation. He could discern two facts: the exploratory unit within these ruins was seeking a particular item, and the information regarding the Underground Kingdom was publically available.

‘It appears as though Deckard was not the only one to have discovered information relating to the existence of the Underground Kingdom.’

Rather, Deckard’s information was only baby steps at this point. He couldn’t even find the entrance to the Underground Kingdom.

It looked as though this exploratory unit knew much more. They knew what was hidden in this dungeon and the dangers lying within. Sungchul could now understand why Willie Gilford had hesitated in stepping in personally. He knew that the Despair of the Abyss had been sighted here. There was no other explanation other than this.

Sungchul left his hiding spot and returned to the darkness of the dungeon. He walked from the entrance back to the path he had created.

When Sungchul arrived at a point devoid of people, Bertelgia spoke again.

“Those Homunculi. It looked as though they were strengthened artificially.”

“Yea?”

Sungchul had perceived that those homunculi were different than the average ones, but he didn't pay much mind to it. At his level, homunculi would always be homunculi.

“But that woman is amazing.” continued Bertelgia

“She must have played around with some grotesque experiments on the bodies of those homunculi, but they still follow her explicitly.”

“Play around with their bodies?”

“Those homunculi. Do you remember that their bodies were completely clad in armor? It isn’t just to protect them. It was probably to prevent them from looking at their own appearances.”

It was nearly nonexistent in Sungchul’s time, but empowered homunculi must have been commonplace during the era Bertelgia was from. The population was decreasing, but they needed the power of magic. They had begun to modify the homunculi that had a human’s intellect to make them prolific for combat and support. The biggest drawback was that the known techniques for strengthening would horrifically disfigure the homunculi’s appearance.

“So that was a thing.”

Sungchul had confronted countless magicians, but he had never seen any that had strengthened homunculi.

“It was probably banned. Such a horrific method was fated to be entered into the list of forbidden spells someday...”

“...”

Sungchul who had been listening to Bertelgia’s story in silence finally discovered a red light beyond the darkness. There was a mound of human corpses. The red light emitted from a magic staff held by one of the corpses. Sungchul carefully looked through the

bodies.

‘A year? Maybe 2? These bodies are in a better condition than the avian corpses.’

These corpses were mummified upon death and retained much of their former appearance. The cause of death appeared to be suicide. Even the corpses with bluish blemish indicating poisoning had daggers shoved up their throats with their own hand.

Sungchul discovered a worn out diary on the body of the mage dressed most eloquently among the corpses. Parts of the record was too damaged from the fluids leaked from the corpse to be read, but the final page had been preserved. Sungchul read through the last page with a nose full of revolting smells.

[Day 14]

Everything is proceeding smoothly. I already await the day that his imperial majesty sounds the news of his victory.

[Day 15]

Wesley and Jara, who had met eyes since a while back, asked me to stand in as their officiant. They requested to hold their ceremony in the Audience Chamber of the Nahak King. The audacious ideas of the Summoned often astound me.

[Day 16]

Jara had disappeared. Wesley left without notice in search for her. I only pray to the God of Order that everything is ok.

[Day 17]

[Day 18]

42325 54423 99832 31125 34238
88823 42321 11232 44235 19321
88768 11132 08323 13578 69180

The records ended at this point. Bertelgia who was reading beside him asked with a quizzical expression.

“What are those last set of numbers?”

“It’s an encrypted message.”

“Encrypted message?”

Sungchul pulled out a faded book from his Soul Storage.

It was a book printed from a rotary press of the modern world. The old book contained a lot of numbers within, but there was also an explanation proceeding them. It was a solution manual for sending secret messages via encrypted broadcast. Sungchul had received this book directly from the Emperor of the Human Empire, William Quinton Marlboro. Before their relationship deteriorated, anyways.

Sungchul opened the book and began to seek out the random numbers along with the explanation following them to decipher the message. The deciphered message was as follows:

[Third Floor Underground, Existence of Massive Cavern, Large Number of Eyeless Monsters, Attacked, Relay Farewell to Family, This is my final request.]

“What was it trying to say?”

Bertelgia hurried him by poking on his shoulder. Sungchul closed the book and returned it to his Soul Storage before speaking.

“It looks as though there is definitely something underground. Monstrous men without eyes seem to be living there.”

The avian corpses were just the prelude to what was to come. There were creatures more bizarre and grotesque lurking beyond them. Sungchul put down the record to continue his exploration of the dungeon. When he finally discovered the stairs leading down to the floor below, Bertelgia diligently recorded Sungchul's path in her pages.

“Map complete!”

Sungchul descended the dark spiral staircase which was littered with skeletons of the avian race. An obsidian door blocked his path at the end of the steps. The Eye of Truth reacted to the magic cast upon it.

‘This is dangerous.’

It was a destructive magic that was powerful enough to cause the entire dungeon to collapse if he activated it carelessly. This was not something that a hammer could solve.

Sungchul approached the door.

[This is a place that only the holy and majestic avian, Nahak, may enter.]

[Display the symbol of the Nahak.]

“What should we do? It doesn’t look as though it’ll just let us pass.”

Bertelgia circled Sungchul’s vicinity while speaking with a concerned voice. Sungchul looked around the door’s surroundings.

Before the door was a small altar with a hole and just below it was an obsidian shard. The obsidian, which was still emitting magical energy, looked just about the right dimension to fit inside the altar hole. Sungchul placed the shard inside the altar as a test. Immediately, magical energies of the altar enveloped the shard then dissipated once more.

[Display the proper symbol]

A sculpture in the form of the avian emitted a red light from his two eyes.

“...”

Sungchul retreated for now.

“What should we do now?”

He ignored the bickering of Bertelgia who was following beside him and took a few steps forward.

‘This looks good.’

It was an ordinary bedrock with no reaction to magic whatsoever. Sungchul pulled out Fal Garaz and swiped at the floor. When the hammer struck the ground, the large bedrock cracked and broke off.

As the entire dungeon shook, hundreds of avian corpses appeared before him. Sungchul resumed his work after the one-sided slaughter. A large hole appeared where he had been pounding away with his hammer, and he jumped into the hole.

Boom!

A weighty landing. The back of the blackened stone door that refused to open stood behind Sungchul.

“Bertelgia. Draw out the map for the second floor starting from here.”

Chapter 65 – Those That Swallowed The Nahak (2)

Boom! Boom!

Sungchul continued the same way he did on the first floor. However, he noticed something different compared to the walls on the first floor as he worked his way through. There were bones which seemed to belong to some animal or even human.

A pile of bones emerged between the brick and mortar masonry wall. Considering more than a few bones were coming out, Sungchul couldn't help but be curious.

He stopped working for a moment to peer at the surface of where he broke the wall. There were countless skeletons stacked within. Sungchul gripped the surface with his hand and easily pulled it apart, and when he did, he discovered a skeleton that had managed to keep its original form intact.

“...”

Sungchul's pupils shrank. These were human skeletons trapped in between the walls. They weren't ones of the avian race. Perhaps, they were buried alive as they were constructing this dungeon. It wasn't just one or two people, but thousands to tens of thousands of individuals that made up this graveyard.

Sungchul finally said, “It looks as though the Nahak were quite

the cruel race.”

“According to legend, the Nahak were known to be an arrogant and cruel race. More than anything, they didn’t have a shred of mercy towards the other races. These corpses were probably once slaves.”

Bertelgia flew about the intact skeleton and explained what she knew.

“Even if that was the case, they did something unimaginable; burying all these living people inside a wall. Those Birdbrains.”

“Why did they do this?” asked Sungchul. There was a gentle fury beneath his voice.

“Couldn’t it be to gather their magical power? You know, using their pain and anguish as nourishment?”

“I would really like to see a living Nahak.”

Sungchul fixed his grip on his hammer as he muttered. His work began once again. The wall fell, and the skeletons within poured onto the floor. This repeated several times until he reached the end of the second floor. Sungchul put his back to a bedrock and took a brief rest. It had been a while since he had used up his strength like this, and he was feeling a bit peckish.

‘Should I make a meal?’

However, this was not a good place to eat. Sungchul doesn't eat just anywhere.

He turned back towards the path he had created, but then witnessed a strange occurrence along the way. Something was huddled over in the distant darkness, gluttonously eating the bones on the floor.

Crunch. Crunch.

Bertelgia tensed her body at the definite sound of chewing bone coming from the distance.

“Uuu... What is it this time? I really want to leave now.”

Sungchul walked over to the creature in question without another word. The creature lifted its head as Sungchul drew close, then let out an ear-piercing scream.

“Kiiii—!!”

It was a sound that wasn't quite human nor beastly, but almost mechanical in nature. Sungchul acknowledged the intricacies of the sound but focused more on the creature's appearance. It looked quite human, but the skin was sickly pale, and the face was so grotesquely twisted that it was difficult to look at without grimacing.

The creature's most striking features were the empty spaces where eyes should have been and the rows of what should be called teeth. The teeth grew randomly and chaotically all over its mouth, and some even punctured through and stuck out of the face tissue.

“Hiii...”

Bertelgia dropped out of the air as if she had fainted when she saw the hideous appearance of the monster. Sungchul picked her up off the floor and placed her into his pocket before glaring at the creature.

“Get lost.”

But the creature did not move. It let out a monstrous cry instead and lunged at him

Wham!

His hammer destroyed the creature's skull and sent it flying off back into the darkness. The broken teeth scattered made clinging noises as they fell onto the floor.

“....”

Sungchul glanced into the darkness. An incalculable number of those creatures approaching this location; silently and stealthily.

Sungchul briefly took a moment to strategize. The question was whether to kill all of the incoming monsters or to simply retreat from here. In the end, he chose to erase his presence and retreat from this place. He was feeling a bit hungry, and it might reduce his long-awaited appetite dealing with the grotesque monsters. He put the gathering creatures behind him and climbed back up through the hole he had created before. There were several members of the exploratory unit loitering outside the hole. When they saw Sungchul, they asked a question out of surprise.

“W-who are you?”

Sungchul looked at every one of their faces. There were five in all. A party composed of two magicians and three soldiers. He couldn't see Mikhael or Mimi. Sungchul pointed towards the piece of cloth attached to his person then spoke.

“I am number 34.”

“Number... 34? Just what are you doing down here in a place like this?”

“I just came down because I saw a hole. Some fun things seem to be crawling around.”

“Something... fun? Are you talking about the Nahak Skeletons?”

Sungchul shook his head.

“The monsters were blind and had a humanoid form, crawling around in droves..”

The faces of the exploratory unit members who heard Sungchul’s words grew sour.

“It sounds like he’s seen the Cave Elves.”

“Cave Elves?”

“Well, they were once existences known as Cave Elves to be exact. Their race was enslaved and brutally exploited by the Nahaks, but after their extinction, it’s the Cave Elves that control the dungeon now. They are strong, persistent, and intelligent. They are extremely dangerous.”

It was at this moment that a piercing shriek rang out.

“Kiii—!”

It was the cry of the blind monsters. The members of the exploratory unit turned pale as sheets, then hurried to leave the place.

“L...let’s return quickly. Scouting, schmouting, we’re all about to die!”

The members of the exploratory unit disappeared into the

darkness as if their pants were on fire. Sungchul had given them a small service. He blocked the hole with a large boulder just in case the blind creatures came through it. After blocking his personal entrance Sungchul continued to follow the path he created.

The brunch for the day was fish. Sungchul jumped into the ice-cold water with a harpoon in hand. There were massive dark creatures swimming in the shadowy water. They were known as the Demon Fish and they lived in the seas along the frontlines of the Demon Realm. They were about as large as an adult male. One of the fish discovered Sungchul, opened its maw, then leaped towards him.

Stab!

The harpoon pierced its forehead. The blood pouring out from its wound dissipated into the water like smoke. The large fish struggled once or twice, but as Sungchul's fist came down upon its head a few times, it gave up.

Sungchul grabbed the massive fish that was about his size with just his arms. A swarm of sharks that smelled blood in the water began to gather. He grabbed the fish's gills to tear off its head, which he fed to the sharks, then headed leisurely towards the shore. The cooking utensils were already kept prepared on land.

“Goodness. At least you're diligent in preparing food.”

Bertelgia, who could not consume food, spoke as such while flapping in the air.

“...”

Sungchul pulled out a blade from his Soul Storage. By the bluish light emitting from it, it had to be some legendary sword. There was a beautifully engraved symbol of a lion representing the human empire on its grip. It was a gift from the Emperor that was coveted by every knight within the Human Empire, but for Sungchul, its use was solely for cooking. The blue tinted blade plunged into the silvery scales of the Demonic Fish, then shook in a flashy manner causing all the scales to fall off quickly. When the fish was descaled, Sungchul left with the fish and headed towards the boiling pot.

Within the pot were dried vegetables, fish, mushrooms, and various other things for a soup stock. Sungchul used a ladle to get a taste.

“Mmm.”

The flavouring was proper. Sungchul sliced off a slab of meat from the fish, sliced it paper thin, then placed it on top of a plate. Chopsticks appeared from within the Soul Storage.

He grabbed a slice of fish, dipped it briefly into the boiling soup, then put it in his mouth. The deep flavour of the soup along with the rich flavour of the fish melted together deliciously in his mouth.

[The score of this recipe is... 63!]

The score appeared before his eyes, but he didn't mind it. He solemnly gazed out taking in the scenery of the Demon Realm as he continued his meal alone. When he was done with the appetizer, Sungchul added dry noodles to the fish soup that was left to simmer and began to boil the pot.

Once the noodles softened up, Sungchul moved it to a bowl and poured the soup on top. Blowing on the steaming noodles, he gulped it down.

“Mmm.”

It had a great taste. He could feel his mind and body being reinvigorated.

“Quite the dedication to food. Really. Every meal.”

When the meal ended, Bertelgia began to pout as though she had been waiting for him the entire time.

“It is important to eat well.”

Sungchul grabbed the half-eaten fish by the tail, then tossed it

toward the ocean. It made a huge splash and made some waves. He then extinguished the fire beneath his pot and washed his dishes in the ocean. It was a wonderful experience to cook, but doing the dishes was always tedious. Sungchul didn't particularly like to do it.

“I wish I had a familiar to do my dishes.”

Sungchul muttered to himself as he cleaned the pot and placed it into his Soul Storage.

“Hmph! What are you talking about?! I am a privileged lady that has never soiled her fingers with chores in her life!”

“That doesn't really sound like something to boast about.”

“Keep a homunculus or two if you want someone around to do your dishes.”

“I don't have a hobby of keeping around those noisy things.”

“How about a Cave Elf? I think they'll be quiet as long as they aren't shrieking.”

“Well... Those monsters might be preferable to a homunculus when it comes to noise.”

Sungchul suddenly recalled the woman that herded around the

five homunculi. She held the title of Captain of the Exploratory Unit, but she was simply a puppet. The actual authority seemed to be held by Willie's son, Mikhael.

‘That woman. Her eyes were fierce.’

He had yet seen her capabilities, but to be placed as the Exploratory Unit's Captain by Willie personally meant that her abilities would be comparable to a court mage. Someone of that level quietly enduring insult from a greenhorn Sword Master was unheard of, and that is even after taking into consideration the characteristics of the Ancient Kingdom. That group was bound to have problems in the future. Not that he cared one way or the other.

Sungchul, who had satisfied his hunger, returned to the dungeon. However, the dungeon he returned to had changed in several aspects. The blind monsters were now present every corner.

“ ... ”

The monsters could not see Sungchul who stood in front of them. They had no eyes. Instead, the monsters differentiated objects through sound and smell.

“Sniff sniff!”

The monster's upturned nose began to sniff the air. Sungchul

snuck through them like a ghost and headed towards the second-floor entrance. The stone was still in the place he left at. This meant that nothing had left through this hole.

Sungchul changed his path to descend down the stairs. There was a large quantity of Cave Elves lingering around the vicinity of the stairs. He slipped by them soundlessly toward the second floor. When he reached the second floor, he found out why the Cave Elves had been flushed out to the first floor. It was because the immovable black door had been flung open. There was a spherical proof of the Nahak placed in the hole. The spherical mark of the Nahak gave off a brilliant light as it sat in the alcove of the altar.

When Sungchul pulled away the symbol of the Nahak from the altar, the obsidian door immediately shut again. He put away the symbol into his pocket and began to ponder on a question.

‘Just who opened this door?’

Nothing was confirmed. It was at that moment when a sharp shriek began to chorus on the floor above.

Chapter 66 – Those That Swallowed The Nahak (3)

Sungchul ran directly to the first floor. The blind monsters waded with their arms to seek his presence, but Sungchul had already moved past them. He passed by them like a gust of wind and the only thing that remained in Sungchul's eyes were the wide-eyed corpses of the Exploratory Unit. One of them was the man that had explained to Sungchul about the Cave Elves. The man had died with his eyes still open, and below his head were two Cave Elves, busily drinking his blood and devouring his flesh. As the Cave Elf's grotesque jaw moved, the man's corpse lightly shifted.

“...”

Sungchul pulled out a single whip from his Soul Storage. The whip was ten meters long with steel cleats embedded along its length that gave off a red light. The Demonic Whip Cassandra. It was an infamous weapon held by the leader of the Balrogs. It was capable of ripping apart the armor and flesh of holy knights with a single blow and was magically enchanted with the ability to sear the enemy with the fires of hell. The reason Sungchul put away Fal Garaz for Cassandra was simple.

Swish!

The ten-meter long whip cracked in the air and struck dozens of Cave Elves with a force enough to pound them into the ground. It was a complete victory with a single strike, and the magical enchantment on Cassandra caused the corpses of the Cave Elves to

burn from the fires of hell. It was a suitable ending for their evil deeds.

What kind of a reaction would the rest of the Cave Elves show from the smell of their burning kin?

Sungchul wondered this as he kicked away two Cave Elves that were dumbly searching around his feet. The monsters had their skulls caved in and died a distance away before they could even scream.

“....”

Sungchul gazed into the darkness. Dozens of Cave Elves were drawn by the sounds and smells to this location. Sungchul sharply struck the ground with Cassandra for them to hear.

Whap!

The light sound echoed in the dungeon, and the mass of Cave Elves began to reveal themselves. Cassandra split the air with one sharp motion. A single strike struck down dozens of Cave Elves like bales of straws. Not even five minutes had passed before corpses of the elves were burning all around Sungchul. It was at this moment when the Cave Elves realized that the man with the whip was not an existence they could contest with.

“Shiiik! Kahiiik!”

A Cave Elf let out a sharp shriek from the rear. It caused the other Cave Elves to abandon their kin and flee into the darkness. Sungchul who had just finished a round of one-sided massacre stood still to focus on the sounds in the cave.

He could hear faint sounds of a battle raging on nearby. The Swordsmen of the Ancient Kingdom were engaged in a fierce fight against the Cave Elves. The Cave Elves had oppressive numbers, but there was a Sword Master on the side of humans. Mikhael swung his blade that emitted its bluish sword aura as he drove into the center of the formation of the Cave Elves.

“3... 2... 1... Go Shoot!”

Mikhael spun like a top and began to blindly slaughter the nearby Cave Elves. He left nothing but chunks of corpses in his wake. However, the Cave Elves didn't take the assault lying down. An aged Cave Elf with piercings made of bones decorating its face fired a bone arrow towards Mikhael which was timed to coincide with when his rotation began to weaken. It flew with a terrifying force toward his neck like lightning.

In that single moment, a man appeared protectively and knocked away the arrow with a staff. Sungchul's eyes lit up with curiosity.

‘Quite a skilled fellow.’

He had wondered who it was, and it turned out to be the man in his forties in the attire of a butler.

“Master. The one capable of capturing the final 5 seconds holds victory. Do not forget this, sir.”

“I appreciate it, Odrias.”

After expressing the proper formalities, Mikhael prepared for the final assault with his subordinate Sword Adepts. The battle ended the moment the old cave elf with the piercings died.

The elves ran away, never to attack again.

Mimi revealed herself once the battle was over by ripping off the veil covering her and her homunculi and walked over to where Mikhael stood.

Slap!

Her hand struck Mikhael’s cheek. A murderous light flashed across his eyes when Odrias restrained him. Odrias shook his head from the far side of Mimi and in an instant, the anger vanished from Mikael’s eyes.

“Why did you open the door?”

Mimi aggressively pressed on.

“Just why did you open the door?”

“It was a door that had to be opened anyways.”

Mikhael answered as he rubbed the cheek that had been struck. A bone chilling hostility rose from Mimi’s eyes.

“Can you even call that an excuse? Can you be so shameless after looking at the tragedy you’ve caused?”

“Tragedy? What tragedy? The real tragedy hasn’t even occurred yet.”

Mikhael spat on the floor as he turned around. He peered at Mimi who was glaring at him through the corner of his eyes as he spoke in a frosty tone.

“It appears that you’re not familiar with my father, Willie Gilford. You shouldn’t interpret his words so literally.”

“... what does that mean?”

“My father said thus: secure the area around the dungeon for a week. But was that really all that he wanted? I don’t think so.”

“....”

“My father probably desired us to finish exploring the deeper areas of the dungeon. Rather than wasting our time for a week doing nothing.”

“I don’t understand why we have to follow orders that weren’t even given?”

“This is the proof that you don’t truly understand the social conventions of the Ancient Kingdom.”

Mikhael treated her as though he was scolding a child. The man in a butler attire met eyes with Mimi, then spoke in a low voice with a nod.

“As master has said, we must hurry. If Master Gilford discovers that we didn’t manage to gain any results by the time he returns, he’ll write us off. I hope you’ll keep this in mind as we progress from this point on.”

Mimi did not speak any further. Even as Mikhael and gang disappeared deeper into the dungeon, she stood blankly staring at the floor with an expression that showed that she didn’t quite understand the situation around her. Sungchul didn’t disagree with her sentiment, but Other World was full of irrationalities such as this. A collection of people with strange social conventions was bound to occur.

“Miss Mimi, are you upset~yeyo?”

A homunculus lingering around her feet carefully asked the question.

“....”

She didn't reply. The other Homunculi who had been keeping quiet began to speak.

“Don't fret, Miss Mimi! As long as we're around, Clearing this dungeon is super easy~yeyo!

“While we're at it, we can hurry this up and just take that thing~yeyo!”

“And then you'll make us into real fairies~yeyo, not homunculi!”

At that moment, a man stepped out from the darkness in front of her. It was none other than Sungchul. Mimi briefly hesitated, but she regained her calm expression and spoke in a soft voice.

“You. You're still alive?”

“...”

Sungchul brushed past her and took in her face, expression, the emotions in her eyes, the magic hidden within her thick robe, and each of the homunculi huddled beneath her feet.

‘She definitely is not someone to be taken lightly.’

She was ready. In many different ways. He couldn't see her stats, but regardless, he could clearly see that Mimi was an experienced magician. Along with the sparkling eyes of the Homunculi beneath their iron masks. After finishing his cursory observations, Sungchul opened his mouth to speak.

“I won't die to something like Cave Elves.”

“I see. Also, it seems that you are quite capable in stealth seeing as even my little guys couldn't detect a thing.”

Sungchul didn't respond to unnecessary inquiries. Instead, he moved on to the purpose for which he revealed himself to her.

“What's that about? That thing which your Homunculi were speaking of.”

A look of surprise appeared briefly on her face.

“Did you come here not knowing about it? Or are you sizing me up?”

“....”

“Well, it's fine either way considering that you and I have different circumstances. I'll tell you because allies can be found in all kinds of circumstances. About what they were talking about.”

Mimi created a small sphere and sent it towards Sungchul. It was a marble of knowledge. Sungchul snatched the marble and accepted the information within. His eyes were soon filled with bright letters.

[Crown of the King of Nahak]

The mighty avian race, who commanded the heavens and the earth, were buried underground and annihilated. The sole survivor, the king of the avian race had sacrificed the entirety of his species in exchange for magic power seldom witnessed in history, but he too succumbed to ruin. Find his final resting place. And obtain his crown. The one who obtains the crown will taste a bit of what it means to be a Nahak.

Reward – Indeterminate

Sungchul who read the long message looked back at Mimi's callous gaze and spoke bluntly.

“Is this what you all are looking for? The crown of the Nahak race?”

Mimi nodded.

“The crown commands an incredible amount of magic power. There is a legend that tells us that whoever obtains the crown will

be granted that incredible strength.”

“Why are you telling me this, I wonder.”

“I don’t know. Maybe it’s because there is no way you’ll get your hands on it even if I tell you.”

Mimi spoke as such and then lightly tapped her head with her finger.

“If you don’t have the knowledge I have that is.”

She made a meaningful smile, then spoke again.

“You. You’re hiding your strength, aren’t you?”

It was a straightforward question. There was no reason to hide it now. Sungchul nodded.

“A bit.”

“I like your honesty. Why not be a bit more honest at this point.

The atmosphere around her shifted slightly. The cold hostility in her voice warmed up, and the wariness in her eyes went away. Mimi spoke in an indifferent tone.

“How strong are you?”

Sungchul didn't hesitate in answering her question.

“I'm probably the strongest human in this dungeon.”

Mimi looked a bit surprised, then asked with a bit of mischief in her tone.

“Even more than Willie Gilford?”

Sungchul opted to remain silent on that question. Mimi laughed brightly.

“That last question was a joke. Although, I'm a bit surprised that you're stronger than those idiot Sword Masters.”

She held a soft smile as she led her Homunculi forward.

“I don't think we were done speaking” said Sungchul as he glared at her back.

Mimi turned slightly and answered with a smile in her eyes.

“If you're as strong as you say, we'll meet again at some point. We'll pick up the story where we left off then.”

Mimi disappeared into the darkness with her homunculi. Sungchul looked at her fading figure with indifference.

‘It looks as though this dungeon is definitely hiding something beyond my expectation.’

Something within him began to ignite once again.

Chapter 67 – Tomb Of The Avian King

After a bit of preparation, Sungchul proceeded to clear the second-floor basement. The large number of Cave Elves weren't a problem.

Fwish! Fwish!

The Cave Elves fled in a panic at the mere sound of Cassandra flicking in the air after a couple massacres. They seemed to possess a certain degree of intelligence as they launched a mass attack with hundreds of individuals hiding in ambush and a traditional upfront assault with a smaller group of elite soldiers. But no matter what tactic or strategy they employed, it was all in the face of Sungchul and his demonic weapon Cassandra.

Fwap! Fwick!

The blind creatures began to tremble at the sound of death itself that this intruder wielded, and did not dare approach him.

“... You're quite experienced at this.”

Bertelgia who had been silent during all this spoke quietly.

“You shouldn't be careless while dealing with primitive races. They are honest in their savagery and trickery. You'll be fighting them forever if they think you're weak or if you give them an inch.”

Slap!

Sungchul spoke as he slapped the whip across the floor once again.

“I guess you’ve done this a lot ”

Sungchul nodded at her comment.

“I’ve been around a few dungeons and mazes.”

Nearly forgotten scenes from dungeons that have become faint in his memory flashed before his eyes. There were some that made him feel nostalgic at the mere sight of them, while others were just nightmarish.

“Anyways, this dungeon. There is a plentiful amount of mana flowing in here, unlike the outside. Do you feel it?”

“A bit.”

A much dense concentration of mana existed here in the Underground Palace of the Nahak compared to the outside to be exact. Plentiful environmental mana meant that same spells would be cast with more power and lost mana would be recovered much more quickly.

“While we’re in this situation, why not use spells to break through instead of the whip? Wasn’t your goal magic proficiency anyways?”

“That is something to consider.”

It was definitely more convenient to proceed using the demonic equipment Cassandra, but it was more appealing to use magic for training as magic was something that improved with usage like the body.

“The environment is also good for Alchemy because high-level Alchemic Items require a lot of mana. You should be able to make up to level 5 Alchemic Items without chugging down Mana Essence like before.”

“You make a good point.”

Bertelgia flew up and down at Sungchul’s rare compliment while pretending to clear her throat in glee.

“Of course. Who do you think Bertelgia is? I am the embodiment of knowledge itself!”

Sungchul placed the whip into his Soul Storage as he continued the exploration. He saw a group of Cave Elves loitering about. Sungchul used Glare on the Cave Elves; the beam of light tore through their flesh burning away their innards.

“Kiiii!”

The Cave Elf that was struck directly with Glare flailed about wildly before falling. The rest of the Cave Elves determined Sungchul’s location and lunged to attack.

Sungchul leisurely dodged their attacks while plugging Glare towards their hearts or under their chins without fail. Every time a beam of light sprouted from his fingertips, a Cave Elf fell.

“Kiii!”

The only one that remained looked like the boss of the lot. Unlike others, it wore a metal armor over its chest and held a weapon and shield made to look like claws by using what appeared to be interwoven beaks.

‘He looks like an adequate opponent to test my current level of strength.’

Sungchul slowly extended his finger to cast Glare. The Cave Elf was instinctively wary of Sungchul’s finger movements and raised his shield.

Chiii~

Glare’s beam of light struck directly at the surface of the shield, but that wasn’t all.

“Kiii?”

It went on to pierce the shield and the breastplate, searing the Cave Elf’s flesh. It didn’t pierce him all the way through, but it was enough to leave the Cave Elf in poor spirits.

A faint smile rose on Sungchul’s lips.

‘It looks like the offensive punch went up because of the environmental mana here.’

The Cave Elf boss lunged forward with his claws made of beaks after taking the hit. Just as the claws reached him, Sungchul stepped to the side to evade then kicked at the elf’s foot. The Cave Elf fell straight to the floor in a mess, and Sungchul aimed at the back of his neck where his helmet and breastplate met with his Glare.

“Kiii...!!”

The Cave Elf shook a single time violently before falling limp. Sungchul repeated the feel of that recent bit of combat in his head as he walked forward. Two more bouts of battle occurred following this one. Sungchul brought down every mob of Cave Elves with only his Glare and finally arrived at a large room.

The room was grand enough to be the audience chamber. The decoration and ornaments that once adorned this room had long

since rotted off or had been stolen. However, the throne made of obsidian and the large avian sculptures around it still possessed the imposing aura of the mighty Nahak race that once dominated the Other World.

“It looks like this is the audience chamber of the Nahaks. Wow, it is quite different... to human sensibilities anyways.”

Bertelgia looked around her surroundings as she spoke with great interest. Sungchul also checked his surroundings as he walked into the chamber. He didn't see any relic that stood out particularly.

Sungchul took a look at the throne. The fact that it had space made specifically to accommodate wings was particularly memorable. It was a shame that all the gems and ornaments had been stolen off from the throne. Sungchul discovered a dust covered sack left beneath the throne. When he opened the sack, the jewels and gold shone brilliantly beneath a layer of dust. It looked as though someone had ripped out everything valuable attached to the audience chamber and gathered it into the sack. But that someone didn't manage to escape to the outside...

“ ... ”

Sungchul dusted off the sack before placing it into his Soul Storage.

“Uuu.. this isn't right.”

Bertelgia put up a protest, but Sungchul didn't bat an eye. After tucking away the jewels, he discovered two skeletons behind the throne. A single spear made of bone pierced through the corpses who lay embraced, like two lovers. Sungchul took the pendant around one of the skeleton's neck. There was a picture of a man and a woman during their happiest moment within the cheap trinket made of brass and silver.

Sungchul left the audience chamber to soon discover the stairs heading down to the third floor basement. On the third floor basement, there was an obsidian door similar to the one on the second floor. The sculpture attached to it lit up as he stood before the door and displayed a message.

[Display the symbol of the Nahak.]

Sungchul brought out the symbol of the Nahak that he had pocketed earlier. It was an object possessing magic made of obsidian. Sungchul placed it into the gap in the altar.

When he did, a gentle green light flowed out from the symbol and the obsidian door that had obstructed him began to open. The stale air that had been trapped behind the door blew toward Sungchul's face.

“Woah. The mana concentration is even thicker here.”

Sungchul was thinking the same thing. The deeper one entered

into the Underground Kingdom of the avian race, the denser the concentration of mana was in the air. Sungchul tore down a wall to confirm his suspicions. Innumerable skeletons poured out of the third floor wall like the walls of the second floor.

“How many thousands of people were stuffed into this dungeon?”

Bertelgia spoke with a slight shudder.

The orientation of the third floor was comparatively plain. There was a line-shaped corridor beyond the door, and several hundreds of doors alongside it. There didn't seem to be any need to break down the walls. Sungchul simply followed the corridor.

The atmosphere of the two floors differed as well. The concentration of mana was one thing, but not a single Cave Elf lingered here. He soon discovered the reason. There was something massive wandering the corridor. It was an obsidian golem with the skull of a bird.

When the golem discovered Sungchul, it fired off a long-range magic attack. Five balls of fire flew toward Sungchul in a spiral formation.

“Hiii!”

Bertelgia immediately shrunk down and dug into Sungchul's pocket. After Bertelgia had been secured, Sungchul pulled out Fal

Garaz as usual. However, he changed his mind slightly as he held the hammer.

‘This golem. How about I try to take care of it with only Glare?’

Golems had strong tolerance towards magic. It wasn’t something he would normally dare to do, but the situation wasn’t a normal one. Wasn’t this place overflowing with mana? Sungchul’s magic power surpassed a beginner’s and nearly reached into the realm of mid-grade magicians, but he might be able to harness a greater power than normal while he is in this underground dungeon.

Booom!!

That is getting a power-up that was similar to the intense explosion of the fireballs fired off by the golem.

Sungchul hastily put away Fal Garaz, and ran toward the obsidian golem. It looked massive from a distance, but he could fully appreciate that it was a gigantic golem of at least eight meters up close.

“Enemy of Nahak. Exterminate.”

The obsidian golem let out a metallic sound as he extended his hand made of stone. There was a magic crystal embedded in the center of his palm. A complex magical formation bloomed from the crystal. Sungchul’s eyes reflexively read off the pattern of the magical formation.

‘Frost magic.’

He immediately evaded to the side. A white frost enveloped the space that Sungchul had once stood in and froze everything in place. He circled around toward the back of the golem. The arm that had fired off the frost tried to follow Sungchul’s movements, but its speed was lacking.

Sungchul stopped at the edge of the frost’s range and aimed the beams of light towards the weak points of the golem, such as the connection between the arm and the shoulder.

Glare fired off with greater brilliance and thickness than usual. Its power was several times higher than before. However, the beam of light only managed to heat up the golem’s joint and failed to pierce it.

‘If only I had more power.’

There was no room for regrets. Glare’s strong points were its short incantation and quick cast. Sungchul continued to cast Glare at its joint in succession until the golem’s right arm separated from its torso.

Boom!

The golem who lost its arm began to swing its remaining arm in in a frenzy and tried to engage in close quarter combat while

spewing blue flames of hellfire from its mouth.

Sungchul kept resisting with Glare, but he could feel the limits of his magic power and retreated, but this space was filled to the brim with mana. He recovered what he lost quickly. Sungchul readied himself to try against the golem once again after recovering his mana from behind a pillar; this process repeated 3 times. After a long battle that lasted 40 minutes, Sungchul managed to defeat the golem with solely his magic.

“Enemy of Nahak... Extermin...”

The core of the fallen golem who had lost his limbs lost its light. Sungchul opened his status window as he appreciated the rapid recovery of his mana in front of the shattered golem.

[Status]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Vitality 801 Magic Power 191(+52)

Intuition 173 Magic Resist 621

Resolve 502 Charisma 18

Luck 8

His magic power had risen by more than 50 by simply being in this space. No only that, his magic power had grown significantly. He was definitely within the mid-180s during the last time he had

checked, but he was now at 190. At this rate, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to hope to surpass the hallmark of a mid-grade mage which was a magic power of 200.

‘This is better growth than I expected. I knew that concentration of mana would help mana recovery and strengthen spells, but does it also supplement growth?’

Sungchul suddenly felt an urge to use other spells. He felt that it might allow for greater growth by using up more mana with more powerful spells against even more formidable enemies, but the only other offensive spell he knew from Cosmomancy was Meteor, and that required an intuition higher than 210.

“It might be good to start by taking a break at this point.”

Bertelgia who was watching him from the rear spoke up.

“Your mana might recover quickly, but the one using the mana is still your body. Just because the tank fills up quicker doesn't mean your body got stronger.”

“I agree.”

Sungchul decided to stop the exploration here for today. He still had two days left. Since he had cleared the third floor in a day, he should be able to go much deeper and perhaps even discover the Nahak's crown. Sungchul left behind the remains of the golem without regrets and left the dungeon.

Fwick!

He left as he slapped Cassandra the demonic weapon along the floor as a warning. After leaving the dungeon posthaste, Sungchul found a rocky mountain upon which he could keep a vision on the dungeon and took a bit of rest. A good rest was a crucial part of any training regiment. However, it didn't take long until a deep ringing sound could be heard in the air. Sungchul looked up toward the sky. An airship was heading his direction from the south. It was Willie Gilford's airship.

‘What? He returned this quick? That doesn't make sense.’

The airship descended at a location near the dungeon. A rope web flew down from the deck allowing several people to disembark from the ship. At least several dozens of people landed onto the surface. However, Sungchul's eyes grew wide when he saw who they were.

‘What? Aren't they... the Suicide Unit?’

It was unmistakable. The worn-out clothes with the prisoner number stitched on with ragged cloth. They were most definitely the Suicide Unit.

‘How did those guys get on board that boat?’

Sungchul soon discovered the reason. There was a familiar face

next to Willie Gilford. It was the leader of the Suicide Unit, the rock-headed Genghis Aaron. He was standing next to the Seventh Continental Champion with a modest posture.

Willie looked back towards Aaron with a smile.

“If I knew you were in this place, I would have requested help a lot sooner.”

“No! If I knew the Duke was near here, I would have come to meet you at all cost!”

When Sungchul saw this, he was reminded of something he had overlooked.

‘Ah, even that guy was a Sword Master from the Ancient Kingdom.’

Their goals weren’t clear yet, but it was true that the two Sword Masters were conspiring something. A small explosion sounded from the entrance. A few members of the Suicide Unit had activated the explosive trap that had been set by the devils as they descended using the pulley operated lift.

“Uwaaaa!!”

Five members of the Suicide Unit fell in free-fall with the lift toward the bottom.

“My my. You’ve already lost some of your precious soldiers?”

Willie clicked his tongue as he spoke, but Aaron looked magnanimous. His eyes sparkled as he spoke energetically.

“There are still plenty left!”

Chapter 68 – Tomb Of The Avian King (2)

The situation had quickly grown dire, but Sungchul did not hurry. Instead, he even pulled out a sleeping bag that he rarely used to get a better rest before heading toward the base of the Suicide Unit rather than the dungeon. He asked Prisoner Number 0 Arkaard regarding the current situation, and to his surprise, Arkaard wasn't aware that a detachment of the Suicide Unit had been redirected to the underground dungeon. All he knew was that the hard-headed Aaron had spun his rusted gears to concoct another foolhardy plan that was assuredly suicidal.

“He led a group of new recruits on a supposed assault on a demon fortress. What did he say? He'll cut down the required number of missions by 3 on success? He uttered some bullshit that convinced about 80 of those newbies to board the airship.”

Firstly, the destination was wrong. Those that remained believed that Aaron had led the soldiers to the demon fortress, not the underground dungeon. Secondly, the number of soldiers was also different. Arkaard had said 80 men, but Sungchul had only seen about 50 in total. Those missing 30 might have become MIA, but Sungchul could guess the true reason for why they were missing.

‘It seems that he compelled the members of the Suicide Unit into the dungeon through violence and coercion.’

Sungchul headed toward the Underground Kingdom once again. There was a small number of soldiers and an airship defending the entrance. Willie and Aaron were nowhere to be seen, and there was no barrier in place as well. It was most likely because the

magicians that had been maintaining a barrier had met their end within the dungeon. The soldiers of the Ancient Kingdom raised their spears and shouted.

“Who goes there?”

At their question, Sungchul pointed toward the ragged cloth number attached to his torso.

“I’m a member of the Suicide Unit.”

“Suicide Unit? They all went in with the Duke. What kind of horseshit are you spouting?”

The two soldiers approached Sungchul and waved their spears threateningly.

“I was a scout sent out by Mr Genghis. I had something to report to him personally, so I followed him here.”

The soldier became less wary when Aaron’s name was mentioned. Their spears shifted toward the sky, but one of the soldiers remained dubious and asked

“Are you really a scout?”

Sungchul nodded. The soldiers huddled together for a brief moment before they decided to let him through. They assumed, by

his desire to enter the monster-infested dungeon, that Sungchul had no idea what lied within and even if he was up to something sinister, Willie Gilford the Seventh Continental Champion whose name was recognized throughout the lands was inside the dungeon anyways. He was not someone any ordinary Suicide Unit could oppose. For all these reasons, the soldiers simply opened the way for Sungchul.

“Thank you.” said Sungchul showing a half-hearted gratitude.

If they had attempted communications with an empath or some other method, he would have had to kill them all.

Sungchul took the lift attached to the pulley to enter the dungeon. The scenery had vastly changed since the last time he went in. There were torches installed periodically along the path with a thick rope affixed to rocks to mark the way. There were also food and weapons strewn about the floor. Compared to the trail left behind by the small group that had entered the dungeon before them, this gave off the impression that an army had passed through.

The rope led directly to the second floor. Once he reached the second floor, Sungchul witnessed familiar sights.

“Ugh... could I have some w-water...”

“Save me! Please!”

“Aaack! My leg! My leg!”

Injured soldiers who had been shoved to the side were screaming out in pain. Two priests were tending to them, but it looked woefully lacking. Sungchul moved past the second floor entrance that had been turned into an infirmary and continued following the rope. He observed traces of fierce battles and a mountain of Cave Elf corpses along the way. It seemed while Sungchul was sleeping without a worry in the world on the surface, the Suicide unit members and the Ancient Kingdom's Sword Masters had battled through the night against the forgotten race which dominated the dungeon and had emerged victorious.

The rope continued down toward the third floor where Willie and Genghis could be seen from the entrance. They didn't look too amicable.

“This is exactly why I can never come to trust you!”

Willie's thunderous scorn echoed throughout the dungeon. Sungchul stopped his steps to observe the situation. Mikhael and Mimi stood before Willie with their heads down looking uncomfortable. Willie was reprimanding Mikhael.

“Just how much disappointment am I supposed to endure from an idiot like you?”

Mikhael stood silently with his head down.

“Due to your incompetence, I lost the majority of the Exploratory Unit in a single day. Those magicians took significant investment.”

“I have nothing to say in my defense.”

Sparks of Willie’s anger soon spread over to Mimi as well.

“Mimi Azrael. I had heard that you were in charge of a scouting unit for the Human Empire last year which is why I invested a significant sum into employing you, but what did I get for it? Is this the limit of what you can do?”

Mimi did not stay quiet like Mikhael. She immediately raised her head to defend herself.

“I did not open the second floor door. That man... no, your son was the cause. I do not understand why I must be blamed alongside him.”

“Aren’t you the squad leader? What is a leader? Isn’t it a position of responsibility?”

When she heard those words, Mimi’s face twisted as though it would swell up and explode. Willie must have known it. Mimi had no real authority in this team. Despite this obvious truth, he had chosen to reprimand her all the same. Mimi could not endure it much longer. She pulled out a symbol from her possession and placed it in front of Willie’s feet. It was an extravagant symbol made of gold that represented her as an ally of the Ancient

Kingdom.

“Ok. I’ll bear the responsibility for this and remove myself.”

However, Willie’s expression remained frosty.

“How will you take responsibility?”

“Isn’t it enough for me to quit? I’ll return all of the fees that were paid for the contract when I return.”

At that moment, the cold steel of a sword sat right before her tongue. Her face turned white from fear, but she didn’t say anything more. If she had moved her tongue even slightly, the sword aura contained within the blade might have cut it to pieces.

“....”

Once Mimi was forced into silence, Willie looked down at the woman below him with a haughty expression.

“In the Ancient Kingdom, taking responsibility means forfeiting your life, mage. Did you think that I would let someone like you to quit midway? Never.”

Willie removed the sword from her mouth, then continued speaking.

“I’ll repeat this so you all can understand. Shut up and listen to it all the way to the end, and once I’ve finished speaking, remove those repulsive little homunculi from my vicinity and lead me to the tomb of the Avian King.”

Mimi had no other option but to nod her head. The humiliation made her head swell, and her legs tremble, but she could do nothing against absolute strength. Willie placed her on display in the front while continuously scolding her with degrading speeches. His derision was never ending.

‘I suppose this is his hobby.’

Unfortunately for Willie, his lectures didn’t last much longer. A short shriek from the rear stopped him from scolding any further. At the same time, Sungchul could feel goosebumps crawling up his back.

“W-what is that?”

“It’s a monster that we’ve never seen before!”

The monstrous creature in the form of an avian that was covered in a layer of mucus appeared from a distance. The Despair of the Abyss. The creature revealed itself once again. However, the Despair of the Abyss didn’t have its eyes set on Sungchul this time. It was headed towards Willie Gilford. The monster walked towards [the man who had been blaming and chastising a child of another for the mistakes of his own](#). On seeing the approaching monster Willie quickly pulled out his sword.

The line refers to a Korean idiom which means that parents often chide children of others instead of blaming their own. Instead of raising their own well preventing the child from making the same mistake, they yell at the other kids unjustly berating them. A case of lack of wisdom and consideration where blind love spoils the child.

“Shit. These were actually here. I thought they were talking out of their ass.”

He was deeply startled. He was peerlessly powerful in comparison to Mimi, but to the Despair of the Abyss, he was no different than any other soldier shitting themselves from fear. Despite this, he quickly regained his composure as expected of a man worthy of the title of the Continental Champions.

He held his sword out, which began to emit Sword aura as he pulled something out with his other hand from the Soul Storage. He soon held a small lantern which contained a blue light. He pointed the lantern toward the Despair of the Abyss and spoke in a loud voice.

“Specter, lost and adrift with no knowledge of where you are, swept away by the flow of time and wandering through the ages, Heed me. If you have eyes, lift up your face and gaze into this flame imbued with ancient Moonlight!”

When the blue light drew closer towards it, the creature, who had been steadily moving forward stopped. The creature looked mesmerized by the light and did not make any further movements. People slowly began to regain their senses from the panic, and they

could clearly see the dark existence that was even omitted from the legends known as the Despair of the Abyss.

When Sungchul saw this, he muttered softly in regret.

‘Ordinary people are not supposed to look at the Despair of the Abyss...’

The Despair of the Abyss was not only terrifying due to its hideous appearance or its ability to drag beings into oblivion but also because weak minded creatures looking directly at it would lose their minds and go insane. It was difficult to express the levels of horrors that composed this terrifying creature.

“Kyaaaaa!”

One of the Sword Adepts who stood looking directly at the creature suddenly held his head and screamed. Willie Gilford who had been preoccupied in dealing with the creature realized his blunder too late and shouted a warning to all around him.

“Everyone, retreat! Do not put your eyes on this creature!”

However, the command was a moment too late. Many of his men had already looked at the creature and had their minds shattered.

“Uwaaaa!!”

A Dwarven Suicide Unit member suddenly lifted his axe and decapitated his comrade with whom he had just fought alongside. Fountains of blood spurted in every direction, and a bellowing battlecry roared simultaneously in the surroundings.

Wille did not lose his composure in the chaos and continued to face the Despair of the Abyss.

“Begone from my sight! You who are buried by endless time!”

The Despair of the Abyss stood dumbly for a while before he turned his body and disappeared into the darkness. The monstrous existence that had caused the chaos had left, but the chaos had only just begun.

“Calm yourselves, everyone! All those who still hold their sanity hide behind me! Hurry!”

Willie shouted in a thunderous voice with the hope of reigning in the chaos, but it was already far too late. Mad men that had already lost themselves to the insanity were cutting down their comrades in full force, and the situation continued to deteriorate.

At that moment, Sungchul noticed two people fleeing separately into different directions. One of them was Aaron Genghis. He was fleeing with the empath that always accompanied him along the rope toward the exit.

“I thought I had hit a jackpot, but it turned out to be a trap!”

The man had no qualms about abandoning his subordinates, but it looked as though he also didn't hesitate to abandon his superior.

The other fleeing the chaos was the one that had been wrongly disciplined by Willie Gilford, the female magician.

"...worthless human beings." said Mimi as she wrapped herself in the invisible veil and continued into the dungeon.

Sungchul had nothing more to see here. He evaded the blades flying in all directions with minimal movements in order to pass by Willie. When he was passing by, Willie unintentionally looked towards Sungchul's direction.

'That guy?'

Looking at Sungchul's face and the cloth number attached to his coat, Willie turned his attention away. He shouted in a commanding voice instead.

"All those who retain their sanity, listen well. Proceed to retreat to the second floor entrance. All those who wish to live, follow my rear!"

Sungchul ignored the command and stood before the stairs that lead to the third floor. There was nothing in his way. He re-entered the massive corridor inside which he battled the golem.

“Krrrr....”

In the distance, another magic golem lifted its body from the ground. There was a feeling of déjà vu, but the result was drastically different.

Wham!

Sungchul’s Fal Garaz struck against the golem’s head, and it was smashed to pieces in a single blow.

“....”

Sungchul didn’t intend to play with it leisurely this time.

‘Training is important, but I cannot afford to take my time.’

There were too many guests to attend to. He didn’t like having too many guests. Sungchul hurried across the corridor and smashed five more golems in a similar manner. It had taken forty minutes last time to deal with an obsidian golem with magic, but now it had taken only three minutes to smash all of them and reach the massive obsidian door.

“.....”

Sungchul stopped before the door that obstructed his path. The door was rigged to explode. It wasn’t suitable to break through the

ceiling like last time either. The booby trap was set not only on the door but also on all sides of the ten meter cube room. It looked as though it was meant to obstruct any path leading down the stairs.

Sungchul put away Fal Garaz and placed the symbol of the Nahak into the altar, but the door did not open.

[You cannot enter with the symbol of the lowly.]

[Return with the symbol of the noble.]

Sungchul felt lost, but at that moment he could feel a faint presence behind him. Sungchul simply waited for them to approach. Finally, the hooded woman underneath the invisible fog revealed herself.

“I guess you might actually be strong?”

Mimi appeared with her homunculi.

Chapter 69 – Tomb Of The Avian King (3)

“Can we become fairies if we cross beyond this door-yeyo?”

“We can take off these heavy and stinky helmets once we become fairies-yeyo! I want to quickly become a lord that rules over humans-yeyo!”

“Miss Mimi! Let’s ignore that human and continue down this path-yeyo!”

The Homunculi began to shout excitedly. Mimi struck the floor with her staff and spoke angrily.

“Everyone quiet down.”

At her scolding, the five Homunculi swallowed their fear and became hushed.

“I apologize. My familiars were excessively loud.”

Mimi put on a pretentious smile as she gave a small nod toward Sungchul. Sungchul pointed toward the obsidian door.

“Can you open this door?”

“Yes. I can open the door. Not only that door, but I can also open the doors of antiquity that lies beyond this door. This’ll be my gift

for your work on those pesky golems.”

Sungchul extended his hand to receive the symbol which he inserted into the slot on the altar.

[One of noble blood, you may enter]

[His Majesty awaits impatiently]

[For the restoration of the Nahak]

The eyes of the avian statue lit up and the door opened with a small tremor.

“It is quite dangerous starting from the fourth floor. I wish you luck. Even if we meet in the Tomb of the King, let us refrain from fighting. We are seeking different things.”

Sound of military boots was then heard from a distance. Sungchul and Mimi both looked back. The Sword Masters of the Ancient Kingdom and the surviving members of the Suicide Unit had entered the third floor.

“Find Mimi Azrael! She must be somewhere around here!”

The one leading the group was not Willie Gilford, but his son Mikhael. He was gritting his teeth.

‘I have to get results this time; otherwise, father will give away my birthright to my younger brother, and I will be cast into the cold’

Willie Gilford had three sons. They had all grown into brilliant Sword Masters, but their relationship couldn't be considered friendly. It was well known that the second son, Mikhael, was far lacking in terms of talent among the three. He was inferior in every way to his brothers; in character, in intellect, and even in skill with the sword. Mikhael wasn't one to listen to these hearsays, but he could also feel that his father's paternal devotion and expectations were dwindling as of late. He had thrown himself into this dungeon in order to regain his value. To the dungeon where almost the entire expedition of mighty veteran warriors and magicians of the Ancient Kingdom had nearly been wiped out.

“Master, do not feel rushed. As long as Master Willie has plugged the exit, Miss Azrael is but a rat in a corner. Don't rush instead, track her carefully and you'll eventually be able to find that female mage.”

Butler Odrias was Mikhael's sole ally. Mikhael who was arrogant and self-righteous, just like his father, listened to the old butler's word without hesitation.

“We've got an unwelcome guest. It might be best to split up.”

When Mimi made a gesture, one of her Homunculi muttered an incantation which veiled them in an invisible fog. She used a teleportation magic within the fog and disappeared to another place. Her destination could not be determined.

Sungchul also hid his presence and melted into the darkness. A spiraling staircase extending down to the fourth floor was waiting for him. Sungchul quickly descended to the fourth floor.

When he reached the bottom of the stairs, glints of emerald light brilliantly shined from all directions.

“Wow....”

Bertelgia couldn't help but whisper in admiration. There were clusters of green gems lining every wall along the fourth floor basement, including the ceiling.

“These are Green Stones of Luminosity. They are all entirely made from Alchemy!”

Bertelgia spoke as she carefully examined the green gems exuding light before her. Sungchul slowly walked down the corridor filled with emerald lights until he noticed something lying ahead. Whatever it was, it was waiting for him. Sungchul stopped his steps and projected his voice further down the corridor.

“Who is it? Reveal yourself.”

Upon hearing his voice, a shadowy figure appeared beyond the bright lights. A hint of curiosity flickered in his eyes. What appeared within the emerald brilliance was something unexpected. A blind creature; a Cave Elf had appeared before him. It had an

appearance different than the Cave Elves Sungchul had seen before, wearing a circlet made of beaks and a dress decorated with feathers. Sungchul's Eye of Truth, his Soul Contract, activated itself.

‘Is it an illusion?’

What appeared before him was an illusion of the Cave Elf, but it wasn't just a simple illusion; It breathed and gave off a foul stench. It was a spell that he hadn't come across yet.

Sungchul finished his conclusions of the situation as he spoke while looking directly at the Cave Elf.

“I said to reveal your identity.”

When Sungchul asserted himself, the Cave Elf swung his staff and opened his mouth.

“Kii.... I-I have not c-come... to f-fight...”

Surprisingly, the Cave Elf spoke in the language of the Other World. His vocalization was airy and the timbre of his voice sounded metallic so it was difficult to understand, but the crowned Cave Elf undoubtedly spoke the common language of this world.

Sungchul glared at the Cave Elf and spoke in a low voice.

“What is your purpose then?”

“I-I have... thoroughly witnessed... your strength. You are one... that we could never oppose... despite this... you cannot go further...”

“State the reason, blind man.”

The Cave Elf shook as though struck with fear then spoke with great difficulty in a trembling metallic voice.

“Beyond here... lies... the King of Feathers and Beaks...”

“King? The King of the Avians?”

“T-That... is correct... The accursed king... who not only buried alive... millions of my kind... but swallowed up his own kind...”

“Are you saying that the King of Avians still lives?”

The Cave Elf who was unfamiliar with Sungchul’s question muttered something unintelligible. Not even Sungchul was able discern a meaning. When this undecipherable mumble came to an end, the Cave Elf slowly continued his speech.

“The King... of Feathers and Beaks... Not even you... can oppose him... He has already far surpassed... the mortal limits... and has stepped into... the realm of lesser gods... If... that thing is

awakened... great disaster... will befall us...”

Those were the final words of the crowned Cave Elf. After speaking, the Cave Elf collapsed, and his entire body went up in black smoke. Another Cave Elf with a different appearance was lying in its place when the smoke had cleared.

‘He must have cast an illusory magic on a living body of his kin.’

It was magic that he had never heard of. It could possibly be the secret magic passed down among Cave Elves from the forgotten ancient era of the past. The Cave Elves must be feeling desperate to use such a magic to warn Sungchul.

‘Quite an unusual thing. The King of the Avians might still be alive according to what the Cave Elves had said, but Mimi hadn’t said a word about it.’

He couldn’t determine which side was lying, but things like this did not bother Sungchul. As long as there was a way to gain more power, he had no choice but to push forward. Sungchul erased all suspicion from his mind and walked forth. A new enemy soon blocked his path. They were the mummified avian corpses. They had a sinister aura about them which was incomparable to the one emitted by the skeletal swarm roaming on the first floor. Sungchul could feel the chill of an insidious black magic from these corpses.

Cassandra, the demonic weapon, made another appearance from the Soul Storage.

Fwick!

The heavy blow from the whip left the corpses in pieces.

At that same moment, another battle was going on somewhere nearby. Sungchul could hear an explosion rather close by along with the scream of Homunculi. He headed towards the noise.

Mimi looked at the limp corpses of the avians with a cold stare. There was not a scratch on her person, but she wasn't without losses. One of the Homunculi had lost its leg and was crawling along the floor.

"Miss Mimi... Miss Mimi... leave behind this Head of Investigations Ujira! I can't go on."

The Homunculus had dragged himself toward Mimi as it bled from its severed limb and whispered in a quiet voice as it grabbed her skirt. Mimi looked hesitant but soon landed on a decision.

"I'm sorry."

Mimi looked toward the other Homunculi.

"New Head of Investigations Ujichu! You'll be casting the veil this time."

She disappeared into the darkness with the other four

Homunculi.

When their presence faded away, Sungchul approached the Homunculus that had lost its leg. The iron mask that had covered the Homunculus's face had been crushed revealing a portion of its hideously twisted face. On seeing this Sungchul began to wonder if these Homunculi had been formed by some other method than the one he was familiar with.

“Enhanced Homunculus... poor thing.”

Bertelgia spoke in a sad voice. The Homunculus who had heard her voice looked towards Sungchul's direction.

“Why are you looking at me-yeyo? Are you perhaps pitying me even though you're just some human-yeyo?”

The Homunculus revealed a completely opposite attitude filled with hostility and aggression as to when it was talking to Mimi.

“ ... ”

Sungchul didn't rebuke it and tossed the creature a bandage. It was some cheap styptic.

“I don't need such things-yeyo! I don't need cheap pity-yeyo!”

The bone-chilling eyes of the Homunculus revealed through the

crumpled iron mask began to spasm, but the homunculus applied the medicine toward the critical injury. It must have felt unbearable pain as it let out a peculiar cry in agony.

“Te-e-e-e-e!!!”

After applying the styptic, the homunculus began to hurriedly crawl into the darkness with its two arms.

“I must... I must repay Miss Mimi for giving us life yeyo... I must...”

More grumbling could be heard from the restless Homunculus that faded into the darkness. Sungchul left the scene.

In front of the dungeon, there were countless avian corpses lying in wait. These hollowed existences of an ancient time had no thoughts and no fear as they had their souls plundered through some sinister dark magic. They only knew to exterminate anyone that dared to intrude upon the tomb of their king.

‘There is no end of them.’

He could fight them all day, but a lot of time was wasting away. He decided to change his method. Sungchul pulled out Fal Garaz from the Soul Storage. He held Cassandra the demonic weapon on the right, and Fal Garaz on the left.

Wham!

The hammer didn't strike the avians, but the stone wall. The wall crumbled to open a path which allowed countless more avians to lunge towards him.

Fwick!

Cassandra, the demonic weapon, split the air with an earsplitting noise. Dozens of corpses were torn apart in the air as they were struck by the whip's oppressive strength.

Wham!

When one mob fell, he broke down another wall. Another mob of avians appeared, and Cassandra shrieked to disassemble his enemies once again. Sungchul repeated this process ad nauseam. Finally he came across to what appeared to be the end to this seemingly neverending process. A square room rigged with a destructive magic appeared before him. He made quick work of all the avian corpses rushing toward him and stood before this room. A message of bright letters appeared before him.

[The Tomb of the Immortal King.]

[Spill the hot blood of the Nahak]

[Do, so and the King shall respond to your call]

Sungchul's eyes trembled. It was because the tomb of the king

was asking for the impossible. The Nahak were already extinct.
There were no living Nahak left.

Chapter 70 – The Last King (1)

“....”

It was utterly hopeless. Sungchul looked around his surroundings to see countless bodies of Nahak strewn about on the floor, but none of them had hot blood flowing through their veins. However, it would be a waste of too much time and effort to give up now.

Sungchul circled around the area of the burial chamber looking for even the smallest of gaps in the construction, but it couldn't be found. Forcing it open with his strength would cause an explosion that might cause the entire dungeon to collapse.

‘Is there any other way...’

He knew of only one person that might know something. Mimi Azrael. He needed her. Sungchul immediately took to action. He turned back toward the path of rubbles that he had created and sought out the young woman with five... no, now four homunculi. He soon found a clue. It was the charred remains of a Homunculus. There were similarly charred corpses of a pair of Sword Adepts beside it.

“This woman. They managed to get on her trail.”

Bertelgia said as she saw the remains. Sungchul observed the scattered footprints on the ground. Mimi had fled north, and at least ten people were following behind her. Sungchul followed

them quickly toward the dungeon filled with emerald light.

It didn't take long before he discovered another two soldiers resting on the floor. They were part of the Suicide Unit. They didn't even have enough energy left to speak and simply nodded towards Sungchul when they saw him as he passed them by.

Soon, he discovered another Homunculus corpse. It couldn't even be recognized as its corpse was torn to shreds and scattered along the ground. Sungchul discovered another homunculus in a similar state before he found their owner.

“Ughhh...”

What he discovered was a woman in such a pitiful state that her continued survival was a form of punishment itself. Both her hands were nailed to the wall with swords instead of stakes and blood dripped from her body that gathered in a pool beneath her like water from a well.. Three Sword Adepts were gathered around her snickering as they swapped stories.

“...”

Sungchul walked up to her.

“Who goes there!”

The three Sword Adepts discovered his presence and pulled out their swords. Sungchul's response to their question was Fal Garaz.

Wham! Blam! Bam!

He ignored the three corpses with their skulls bashed in and approached Mimi.

“My God... how could anyone do such a thing.”

Bertelgia hid behind Sungchul’s back as though she couldn’t bear to watch. Sungchul pulled out a healing potion and fed it to Mimi.

“Uu... Uh...”

Anyone else would have simply accepted death, but Mimi was resilient.

“O-one more...!”

She bit down on the bottle’s opening like a hungry baby onto a nipple and struggled to get every last drop. Sungchul gave her another potion as she asked.

“T-thank you... but who are you?”

Sungchul then realized.

Eyes that should have been sparkling from between her

disheveled hair had been stabbed and had already lost their light.

‘Darkness leads to fear. Truly a despicable method. I don’t know who’s done it, but it isn’t their first time.’

Sungchul contemplated this as he revealed his identity.

“I’m number 34.”

“Ah... it’s you... I thought as much. Hold on a moment.”

She raised herself in an attempt to talk, but she collapsed before she could fully extend her knees. There was an injury behind her ankle where a knife was used to gouge out a portion of her leg.

“It looks as though your Achilles tendon was removed. That can’t be healed with potions. You’ll have to get it healed by a high priest personally.”

“Shit... shit... those bastards...”

Mimi was collapsed onto the floor while muttering profanities under her breath. Sungchul waited for her to calm down before speaking.

“Who did this? Willie Gilford? Or Mikhael?”

“It was neither. Mikhael only knows how to slap women. It was the butler that he carries around. Who knew that such a quiet old man would know such diabolical torture methods.”

The nightmarish moments flashed by her eyes once again causing her to shudder in fear.

“...we have to hurry. They know everything!”

“About what?”

“About how to find the tomb of the Nahak King. Everything happened in a flash.”

“To open the tomb of the Nahak King, you need the blood of a living Nahak. They can solve that problem?”

“I gave them the location of a living Nahak. They are most likely headed towards that direction.”

“Just where is that exactly?”

Sungchul eyes lit up. Mimi wiped the blood dripping off of her forehead with her sleeve as she spoke.

“Take me with you. I’ll lead the way.”

Sungchul slung her across his back.

“Can you hang on?”

“I am strong enough for that at the very least.”

Reluctantly, Mimi gave Sungchul the information that she held. The location of the last remaining Nahaks. Sungchul’s eyes shook when he heard it.

“They are at the dwelling of the Cave Elves?”

It was difficult to swallow, but even if it was hard to believe, he had no choice but to listen to Mimi. Sungchul stood before the small opening on the entrance to the fourth floor. It looked as though a typhoon had passed through it. There were frightening amounts of Cave Elf corpses strewn about the floor.

Sungchul followed a trail of blood towards the direction the human expedition traveled which led to a massive cavern beyond a dark cave. In this space of utter darkness where not even a single strand of light broke through, there was an uncountable number of huts made of feathers, bones, and hides of insects and reptiles. It was the city of the Cave Elves.

“There is a breeding farm over to the Southeast.”

Mimi spoke as they entered the city.

“A breeding farm?”

It sounded jarring.

“An enemy!”

Bertelgia shouted. As expected, a mass of Cave Elf warriors stood before Sungchul. Sungchul struck the ground with the demonic weapon Cassandra. Its unique cry resonated in the air causing the Cave Elves to lose their will to fight and flee. They had already acknowledged that this human was not an opponent on their level.

After passing through countless waves of Cave Elf warriors in a similar manner, they ran over to the breeding farm in question. A fishy smell passed by their noses, and they could hear something similar to the cry of a bird. They headed over to the massive tent made of bones and feathers where they finally spotted them.

“Buckaw..!”

The beings that inhabited this massive bones cages had the beak and wings of a bird and the body of a human. They were the Nahak.

However, they were locked in cages, making chicken noises.

“Bawk... Bawk...”

It wasn't just the one. The hundreds within this tent were no longer the Nahak of legends that ruled the skies and land, but domesticated beasts. Sungchul could see decapitated Nahak corpses dangling from a corner of the tent designated as the butchery.

Mimi who was being piggy-backed smelled a sharp stench of bird droppings and said,

“After the Nahak kingdom collapsed... the Cave Elves grabbed the children of the Nahaks and raised them as cattle. Here, the Nahaks are immediately thrown into these coops at birth, treated like animals for their eggs, then butchered when they come of age.”

“In some ways, this might have been the ultimate revenge.”

Sungchul spoke as he recalled countless corpses of Cave Elves that had been buried alive within the walls that had broken through.

“Where did you find the clues that lead here?”

Sungchul asked as he looked around his surroundings.

“I focused on the weapons that a few of the Cave Elves were using. They seemed to have been adorned with feathers and beaks.”

“That does seem to be the case.”

The Cave Elf that had appeared before to warn Sungchul was similarly decorated.

“But where would there be a bird in a dungeon this deep? Even if the Cave Elves wandered outside, they would never be able to catch any flying birds with their blindness. This line of questioning led to the correct hypothesis.”

“Impressive.”

Suddenly, a thought entered Sungchul’s mind.

“You’ve been here before, haven’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Why did you fail then?”

“We took too long. Well, before I learned of this truth.”

“I see.”

Sungchul grabbed one of the Nahak within the coop.

“Baww Baww!”

It was still a young beast, but it didn't show any sign of intelligence, similar to the other Nahak. Bertelgia looked around the area surrounding that Nahak with curiosity and spoke.

“Hmmm. This is that Nahak of legends? Looking like this, they aren't any different from the chicken in a poultry farm.”

“Baww Baww!”

Suddenly, the young Nahak made a fuss and began to peck at Bertelgia.

“Hey hey! It hurts, you birdbrain!”

Sungchul looked at the scene and spoke in a firm voice.

“Bertelgia. Get inside my pocket.”

“Why?”

“Because we're going to move at full speed.”

Bertelgia didn't say anything more and stuffed herself into his pocket. Sungchul took a deep breath and propelled himself forward with the godlike strength in his body. The Cave Elves

couldn't see it, but they knew that the one they didn't dare oppose had crossed by their domain.

Sungchul who had returned to the dungeon through the opening stopped his steps and reassessed his directions.

“Excuse me.”

Mimi, who had been on his back, opened her mouth to speak.

“What is it?”

Sungchul didn't bother looking before replying

“You. You're really strong. I can feel it. Even though I can't see it.”

Sungchul could feel a sigh spilling out of her onto his back.

“If it's small talk you're after, I'll have to refuse.”

“The Nahak you've caught just now. What is the color of its feather?”

She asked in a different tone.

“White.”

“Ah, I see.”

“Why do you ask?”

“I was suddenly curious. Last time, we grabbed some blue ones and some white ones.”

“...”

Sungchul didn't feel a need to respond. Mimi already had another question.

“Could I ask a favor?”

“This is the last one. We don't have time for small talk.”

“Did you perhaps see my homunculus? Not the dead ones, but ones that are still alive.”

“I only saw three dead corpses.”

“I see. That means there's still one living. No, is it two?”

Mimi suddenly let go of Sungchul's neck.

Thud.

Her body fell beside his feet.

“What are you doing?” asked Sungchul as he looked down at her fallen form.

Sungchul looked down at her fallen form and asked.

“I’ll remain here. I don’t want to meet the people that did this to me.”

“They are not on my level.”

“Even if you say that, the fear that has been carved into my body is difficult to erase.”

The blind and lame Mimi looked around as she screamed with a pitiful voice.

“Ujicha! Ujicha! Where are you! Ujicha!”

“...”

Sungchul left her behind and moved towards the tomb of the Nahak. As he followed the path that he had created, a square-shaped burial chamber revealed itself. However, there were some

unwelcome guests in front of the chamber. They were the soldiers of the Ancient Kingdom. Mikhael Gilford and the man named Odrias stood in the center of them.

“Now, spread the blood of this chick on the altar.”

There was a baby avian fluttering in Odrias’s bloodied hands. It was also white like the one Sungchul had brought.

Odrias slit its throat without hesitation.

“Baww BAWK-!!”

Crimson blood spilled from the avian. Odrias held the avian’s bleeding corpse on top of the altar. The concave space on top became filled with blood.

‘Was I a step too late?’

Sungchul observed the situation from a short distance. A geometric pattern formed on the surface of the obsidian burial chamber. It was a magical formation... no, something similar to one.

‘It’s a magical formation I’m not familiar with. Is it some magic technique of the Nahaks?’

The surface began to tremble. Something was about to happen. It

was the burial chamber. The blackened square burial chamber split perfectly in half and revealed what lied within. Mikhael clenched both his fists as he looked at the black grave with a face swelling with pride.

“Finally. I did it! I finally did it!”

He approached Odrias while still holding the avian corpse and shouted with his voice filled with happiness.

“Old man Odrias! We did it! We really did it!”

“Not quite. It’s not yet the time to lower your guard. Didn’t I say so before? You can only climb up if you do everything right to the very end.”

“Yes. You did say that.”

Mikhael laughed awkwardly before returning to his tense expression. The rumbling finally stopped. The burial chamber opened. Everyone held their breath as they approached the newly opened chamber. Sungchul quietly moved closer to them.

There were two sarcophagi within the tomb.

“Two sarcophagi? Are there two Kings of the Avians?”

Mikhael scratched his head as he spoke. It was unexpected, but

he continued optimistically.

“It’s better with two sarcophagi. More for us to take.”

As his words left his mouth, the two sarcophagi opened. The swordsmen of the Ancient Kingdom held their breath as they watched the sarcophagi open. Suspicion rose in the hearts of all present. The corpses within the two sarcophagi wore extravagant garments with equipment adorned with gems indicating their prestigious heritage, but everyone could see a single critical error. The ones within the sarcophagi were not avians. They were without beaks or wings. They were Cave Elves.

Chapter 71 – The Last King (2)

They were almost identical in appearance, but the weapons that they were wielding were different. One held a sword, and the other held a staff. They also had one critical difference from the other Cave Elves. Their eyes. They possessed artificially inserted eyes that shined like brilliant rubies.

“Was it you all?”

The Cave Elf wielding a sword spoke as his eyes flashed a deep crimson. The voice was both dreary and authoritative. The humans surrounding him felt pressured from just hearing his words.

“Young Master.”

Odrias leaned in toward Mikhael’s ears.

“I have a bad feeling about this one.”

Mikhael had recognized that the series of events were becoming increasingly bizarre, but he hadn’t thought of retreating.

“No. I don’t think so.”

Mikhael didn’t want to err by throwing away this opportunity that had taken great efforts in the making. His only thoughts were

on how he could return the spoils of victory to his father as quickly as possible.

‘Victory is within my grasp! Did you think I would back off when I am this close to my goal?’

The shameful days in which he was criticized and scorned for being average passed through his eyes like a movie.

“Are you both the Kings of the Avians?”

Mikhael broadened his shoulders as he shouted with foolhardy confidence, and the two Cave Elves with shining, eyes, stopped their movements and turned to look at Mikhael.

“I have revived you two. Therefore I demand a suitable reward. A king must honor his promise, no?”

He stared them down without flinching. The Cave Elves returned his gaze and made no further actions. Meanwhile, Mikhael felt as though his heart would explode within this moment of silence.

‘Hurry up. Bring me my reward quickly. The Crown of the Nahak which will prove my worth to all!’

The sword wielding Cave Elf pointed his finger toward Mikhael. Delight and heightened expectation brightened up Mikhael’s eyes, but only for a moment.

“We are not the king. We are but his most faithful servants.”

The Cave Elf wielding the staff finished their introduction.

“We are the guardians protecting the tomb of the great king. We seek out the liars and strike them down.”

Mikhael’s mouth twisted into a weird shape. His expectations had been shattered. Odrias hurriedly tugged on his sleeve from the side.

“Young Master.”

The situation had turned sour. Mikhael understood this mentally, but his heart could not accept this truth. He continued to waddle in shock when both of the Cave Elves pointed towards Mikhael and his group.

“How dare you sacrifice the blood of some lowly commoner to the monarch of the skies and earth!”

Both of the Cave Elves let out a thunderous roar as even the air around them seemed to chill. A silence full of hostility filled the air. The Ancient Kingdom’s swordsmen, who had been looking in on the situation from a distance, finally began to realize that the situation was worsening and exchanged glances.

“There is only death for those who disturb our king’s resting place with foul blood.”

“We shall wash away the unclean blood you have brought by using your own”

The two Cave Elves raised their weapons.

“Young Master!”

Odrias pulled out his sword and stood protectively in front of Mikhael.

“Now! You must es-...!!”

He didn’t even manage to finish his warning when an unseen magical shackle constricted his body and a sword adorned with gems pierced his skull.

“O-old man!!”

The desperate cry resonated towards the tomb of the Avian King above. Odrias, who had been a powerful Swordmaster, had been killed by a single strike of a blade causing the swordsmen of the Ancient Kingdom in the vicinity to lose their will to fight. Mikhael was no exception.

“I am no match for them! I-I have to get father!”

He immediately turned around to escape, but the Servants of the Nahak weren't sitting idly by. The magical chains bound his torso, and the sharp blade severed his leg.

“Aaaaah!”

Mikhael who had his femoral nerves severed screamed like a beast and began to roll about in front of the tomb of the king. The two Cave Elves that had suppressed Mikhael began to attack the remaining swordsmen of the Ancient Kingdom. It didn't take much longer to clean up the riff raff. The other five excluding Odrias were dragged into the tomb with their legs severed.

“A peaceful death is a pipe dream for the likes of you all.”

“You will listen to the sound of your own breathing as you suffocate to death in utter darkness.”

The Cave Elf wielding the staff chanted some spell causing one of the walls to crumble and the skulls within to pour out. The other wielding the sword threw them into the wall one by one.

“N-no!”

“Stop this!”

“I-I'm really sorry! Mercy!”

Their cries of mercy were swallowed up by the wall that magically sealed itself. The bleak desolation and shrieks of pain rang out beyond the wall like an echo.

“ ... ”

Sungchul had been watching everything.

‘Mimi must have seen a similar spectacle. She must have escaped by herself somehow.’

The Cave Elf wielding a sword turned its head towards where Sungchul was hiding.

“Who is hiding there? Identify yourself.”

Sungchul did not reveal himself from the darkness. The Cave Elves looked over in his direction for quite a while before they walked towards their tombs. The Royal Servants could not find Sungchul.

‘So they’re only around this level.’

Sungchul let out a shallow sigh before quietly revealing himself.

“Bawk! Bawk!”

The young Nahak in his grasp cried out as it flailed. The Cave Elves that heard this turned their heads. The red rubies embedded into their eye sockets let out an eerie light.

“Who are you?”

The two Cave Elves spoke simultaneously. Sungchul revealed the young Nahak in his hand as he spoke.

“As you can see, I am here to make a sacrifice.”

The Cave Elves looked toward the Nahak held in his hands. It was a beast that possessed white feathers.

The eyes of the Cave Elves flared angrily once again.

“You dare bring another pathetic white feathered one? Did you not witness what happened after the mistake of your kind?”

“It just signifies the level of these detestable humans.”

Sungchul silently listened to their rumblings as he contemplated on their words.

‘So it was the color of the feathers that was the issue.’

Sungchul tried to recall the scene back at the poultry farm. It was difficult to parse due to the poor lighting, but he could recall that there were only white-feathered Nahaks there. It meant that Nahaks with feathers colored other than white were rare.

‘As expected, the woman must have known everything.’

Regardless, there was a problem at hand to attend to; the servants of the Royal King that were fuming with hostility towards him. Sungchul released the Nahak in his hands.

The young Nahak began to look at the foreign surroundings with wonder and curiosity until he discovered Odrias’s corpse and pecked out his eyeball with its beak. In the time it took for the bird to swallow the eye loudly, Sungchul extended his right hand. Fal Garaz suddenly appeared within it. The divine tool which was crafted from the shards of the sky itself.

“...!!”

The two Cave Elves that witnessed its majesty began to hesitate. Its might was something that didn’t require explanation to be felt. They could feel that there was power and history behind that weapon.

“Both of you! You’re all done for!”

Bertelgia, who had now grown accustomed to this pattern of events, began to shout from Sungchul’s back. Sungchul hefted the

hammer on his shoulder as he walked toward the Cave Elves.

The Cave Elf with the staff began to utter an indecipherable incantation. A mysterious magical formation began to ripple out from his lips. Sungchul didn't know what it was when he first arrived here, but he figured it out now.

‘Is it some kind of restraint?’

Invisible shackles bound his arms and legs firmly. Sungchul's Soul Contract, The Eye of Truth revealed to him that the shackles were made of vengeful souls of the deceased.

‘Such vile magic.’

The sword wielding elf began to rush towards him. It was the same tactic that had caught Odrias off guard, but this kind of method wouldn't work on Sungchul. God-like power coursed through his veins. He could feel that wave of power and began to lightly move his body.

“Kwaaaaa!”

“Gyaaaaak!”

Hellish screeches and cries of agony could be heard as the restraints formed of souls that bound his four limbs began to tear.

“...?!”

The staff wielding Cave Elf suddenly froze. Something impossible had occurred. The sword wielding Cave Elf had been completely focused on the task of piercing Sungchul's head and waited for the sensation of the sword digging into his chest and piercing his heart. However, his expectations didn't come to pass. A blunt force lightly shook his body.

Grip.

The powerful hands of a human wrapped around his neck. Shock and terror appeared in the Cave Elf's ruby red eyes. When strength passed through the hand that gripped his neck, the Cave Elf dropped his blade and used both his arms in an effort to free himself from the human's grasp. He tried to scratch the man with his sharp nails, but it wasn't enough to even leave a mark on the firmly gripped hand.

Krrrt!

The Cave Elf lost consciousness along with the sound of something snapping echoing in the halls. And after a loud impact, its body was forever destroyed.

“....”

Sungchul tossed away the Cave Elf corpse with a crushed skull and moved to face his next enemy. The remaining Cave Elf began

to wave his arms while quickly rushing to speak.

“Wait, human! I’ll tell you a method. A blue feathered...”

Wham!

The number of crushed heads grew to two.

“So it’s the blue feathers?”

The pieces of the puzzle fell into place. All that was left was for Sungchul to return to the poultry farm to seek out a blue feathered Nahak.

“Hey, what are you going to do about that guy?”

Bertelgia looked toward the young Nahak that was chewing on Odrias’ corpse as she spoke.

“...”

“You’re not going to use him in one of your recipes, are you?”

“I don’t eat anything with intelligence.”

“Really...?”

“...except dragons.”

Sungchul put away Fal Garaz into his Soul Storage and headed toward the poultry farm, but as he was about to step out of the room with the gravestone, he could hear someone’s voice from another entrance.

“Miss Mimi! It’s over here-yeyo! The black square is here-yeyo!”

It was a homunculus’s voice. Sungchul stopped in his tracks and looked over in the direction of the voice. From the corner of a hidden entrance, an armored homunculus was leading a bloodied woman. It was the blinded Mimi Azrael.

The woman who could no longer see in front of her moved her head as if trying to look around her surroundings and spoke,

“Ujicha. Are you sure that the Swordmaster is dead?”

She asked with her voice thick with genuine fear.

“Yes! This Ujicha saw it himself-yeyo! Miss Mimi! The Swordmaster died to the Cave Elves with the shinies-yeyo! There is that bad guy’s corpse over there-yeyo!”

“What about the Tomb Guardians?”

“Ara? I thought I saw them enter the tomb, but now they’re all dead-yeyo.”

“Dead? The Guardians?”

“Yes. All of their heads were caved in-yeyo.”

“How did that happen? For the Guardians to die... could it be Willie Gilford himself...?!”

She sucked in her breath and focused on her hearing. There was only a deathly silence with no sounds of the living.

“Let’s move quickly, Ujicha.”

“I understand-yeyo!”

The homunculus led Mimi towards the altar. Mimi reached out to feel for the altar, then when she managed to find it, she pulled out two magic staves from her Soul Storage to use as crutches to stand with all of her strength.

“Urrrrrk...”

Mimi, who now stood in front of the altar, looked down towards the homunculus who should be standing beside her feet and spoke in a soft voice.

“Ujicha. Can you give me a big hug?”

“What? Miss Mimi is going to hug me-yeyo?!”

The homunculus spoke with a tearful voice.

“I just have one last request.”

Sungchul and Bertelgia were watching the scene quietly from a distance.

“What could they be doing?”

Bertelgia held her curiosity and asked Sungchul who was beside her. Sungchul also had the same question.

‘What could this woman be trying to do?’

He continued to watch Mimi’s actions. The homunculus went into her embrace.

“Take off your helmet.”

She spoke softly.

“Can I really do that-yeyo?”

When the homunculus asked carefully, she put on a magnanimous expression and nodded her head. Soon, the homunculus took off his iron mask. The grotesque appearance that lay within was completely exposed without any filter. Rather than a face, it looked more like several grotesque pieces of meat had been sewn together to form the face tissue.

“Urk...”

Bertelgia couldn't bear looking at the appearance any longer and hid behind Sungchul, but Sungchul didn't miss a single moment of that enhanced Homunculus' bare face. One thing stood out as odd. It looked fundamentally different than a normal homunculus. Something that was hidden beyond the hideous scars, numerous boils, and charred burns.

‘It wasn't a normal homunculus as expected. More than that... that mouth... did she rip a beak out of its face?’

At that moment, the homunculus' body suddenly stiffened. A sharp dagger had been stabbed into its neck.

“Miss... Miss Mimi...?”

The homunculus stuttered like a clockwork doll as it turned its head with red blood pouring out of its neck. Mimi pushed the homunculus down onto the altar and shoved the dagger deeper as she spoke softly.

“I’m really sorry, but there’s no other way.”

“This life was given by Miss Mimi anyways-yeyo. It’s only right that Miss Mimi takes back what she gave-yeyo, but everything is growing so dark-yeyo. It hurts so much-yeyo...”

“...when I get stronger, I’ll revive you guys.”

Mimi twisted the dagger embedded into its neck. Something seemed to snap as the homunculus instantly died, and its blood began to fill the altar.

Surprise overtook Sungchul’s eyes.

‘Could that homunculus have been created with the blood of a blue-feathered Nahak?’

The ground began to tremble, and a deep rumbling that pierced the dungeon in its entirety could be heard by everyone within. The black gravestone began to rise into the air. Within the burial chamber, the real burial chamber of the Avian King finally revealed itself.

[All those living and dead, kneel]

[make way for the Final King, Marakia]

At the same time. There was a relic upon the Tower of Recluse, an ancient tower revered as the most mystical and holy structure of the Other World, known as the Scripture of Calamity. There was an all important change occurring to this relic which can only be altered by the divine will.

“What the...! Are you saying that a new clause is being added to the Scripture of Calamity?!”

The tower’s owner, the Holy Man Porpyrios, began to head towards the sacred location in which the Scripture of Calamity was held without care for his attire. He witnessed it. Along with the alteration of the previous seven calamities, a new calamity was being recorded on the first line simultaneously.

[The King of Feathers and Beak that devoured his own kin will spread his wings of sin once again to swallow the world in darkness.]

Chapter 72 – The Last King (3)

The fog lifted and the being within the tomb slowly revealed itself. The face and wings of a hawk and the torso of a human. It was an avian. Most noble of all avians, It was the King of the Nahaks. He had pitch black feathers and a shining gold beak, and he was gazing out towards the world with his piercing eyes as though he wanted to devour it all.

As he stepped down from his tomb, he looked toward Mimi who was sustaining herself precariously with two staves.

“I am Marakia. Who are you, foreigner?”

If one ignored the overwhelming pride exuding from every inch of his body, his voice actually sounded youthful. Mimi could not see what lied in front of her, but she knew she stood before the legendary and destructive existence that she had sought.

“My absolute monarch of the earth and skies.”

Mimi put both her hands together in a grovelling gesture as she spoke.

“This pathetic and insignificant Mimi Azrael of the human tribe greets you.”

Marakia tilted his head slightly to look at her.

“You are blind in both eyes.”

Marakia extended his hand filled with rings adorned with gems and brushed across her face as though stroking it.

“Ah...! Your highness!”

She suddenly realized that she could see once more and threw herself at Marakia’s feet out of gratitude.

“However, where are my servants and my people?”

“Your Highness’ servants and people... have long since disappeared.”

“What did you say?”

A small creature began to linger in the corner of his eyes. It was the white feathered baby Nahak that was feeding upon Odrias’ corpse.

“Isn’t that one of my people? He might be of low blood with his white feathers, but he is still one of my subjects nonetheless. Where are my blue feathered nobles and advisers?”

“They... have already... become extinct for the sake of raising your highness to your god-like status.”

“Ah!”

Marakia let out a short exclamation. He thought back to the days before his long slumber, to the time when his race had flourished. The bleak moment before the Calamity came down upon them, the King and the Council had decided to bet everything they had on Marakia who was born with the black wings of legends said to be the mark of the one destined to bring salvation to their race, and committed to performing a ritual as their last act of desperation.

He was momentarily steeped in his memories.

“I see. I had fallen into an eternal slumber after that moment.”

“That’s correct, your majesty.”

Mimi adjusted her mangled legs to grovel before Marakia. She looked up towards him carefully and spoke again.

“And I have woken you from that eternal slumber despite countless dangers and obstructions.”

“Is that so? Then I suppose it is only correct to bestow upon you something appropriate.”

Marakia raised his hand, and overwhelming power gathered into it. At that moment, slow but firm footsteps could be heard from the darkness on the opposite side of the room.

“ ... ”

It was Sungchul. Curiosity rose within Marakia's eyes.

“Just who is that?”

Mimi desperately evaded Sungchul's gaze as she answered his question.

“That man is one of those that did not want your majesty's rebirth. It might be good to rid yourself of him.”

Bertelgia scoffed as though it was the most ridiculous thing she had ever heard.

“What?! Listen, lady! How can you be so ungrateful to say that we are the enemy after we saved you? Are you even human?”

Sungchul calmed Bertelgia who was buzzing about in anger with a wave of his hand, then looked toward Marakia and Mimi alternately and spoke calmly.

“Mimi Azrael. I have come to receive the crown as promised.”

Mimi did not give Sungchul a single glance. She continued to kneel before the Avian King and pleaded to him.

“Just look your highness. They aim for your majesty’s crown. You must not forgive such transgressions of those coveting the crown of the Nahaks with no beaks or wings.”

Marakia was barely listening to Mimi’s words. His violet eyes were focused intently on this foreigner with a strange attire composed of a dusty coat and a pair of worn out jeans.

‘This human. He is definitely not normal.’

It was at that moment when another figure leapt into the tomb.

“What is happening?! Mikhael Gilford! Odrias!”

It was the Seventh Continental Champion, Willie Gilford. He had been outside the dungeon when he heard the strange rumblings that shook the entire dungeon leading him to follow his suspicions to this place with a small group accompanying him. However, his son that he was looking for was nowhere to be found in this tomb. Instead, in the main chamber of the tomb, there was a strange young man that appeared to be from the Suicide Unit, the Exploratory Unit leader Mimi Azrael, and an avian with black feathered wings.

His eyes were locked onto Marakia. The grand outfit and decorations that surrounded the avian’s entire body, the overwhelming oppressive feeling that pushed against his entire body, and the avian’s appearance; There was only one guess that he could make.

‘Could it be? Mimi Azrael... did she awaken the Avian King? And just where is that idiot Mikhael?’

His son was nowhere to be found.

“And what is that?”

Marakia directed his question towards Mimi. She hesitated slightly but made her resolve before answering.

“That man is our enemy.”

“Lies! That person is my employee.”

Willie raised his voice as he spoke. Mimi trembled as she felt fearful of the overwhelming strength in his voice. This was what it meant to have the strength to hold the title of the Seventh Continental Champion.

Willie glared at Mimi as he questioned her.

“Mimi Azrael! Where is my son?”

As he spoke, a weak voice rang out from the wall.

“Kuu... S-save me...”

It was the voice of his subordinates trapped by the servants of the king. Willie immediately went towards the voice and split the wall with his sword. The wall split cleanly allowing the people trapped within to spill out. Mikhael was among them.

“Mikhael!”

Willie quickly embraced his son’s body and shook him. Mikhael was already dead. His mind broke much earlier within the darkness to despair, causing his body to follow soon after.

“This damned...”

Willie’s eyes lit up with intense flames, but he was also a person of great caution. He didn’t have any desire to fight with the King of the Nahaks whose strength couldn’t be determined. He quickly calculated in his mind to coordinate with the avian king for a benefit or to cut his losses and leave with his son’s body. However, he couldn’t find any leverage to use.

‘In any case, where did Odrias go? I stuck him with my son to watch over him. Where is he now?’

He looked around his surroundings and soon a single corpse abandoned in a distant corner came into his view.

‘That attire...?’

Willie, whose eyes were drawn to the corpse's face due to the familiar outfit it wore, was beyond shocked with what he saw.

“Odrias Sikoro!”

His former comrade and most trusted subordinate was in the middle of being pecked to pieces by a white feathered avian chick.

“This bastard!”

Willie flipped out. Just who was Odrias to him? He was the most loyal of followers and the first to swear allegiance to Willie, of whom everyone had looked down upon for being a summoned; Odrias had fought with his back pressed against Willie's in countless battles. It was such a tight relationship that he had stuck him with his pathetic son even after the man had retired as the boy's mentor. It might have been more odd for him to retain his calm after seeing such a man being pitifully pecked apart by some chicken.

Willie grew furious and booted the young chick that was pecking at the corpse.

“Baww baww!!”

The avian bounced away like a ball until it hit the floor, then thrashed about a bit and died.

“How dare a fucking chicken try to eat my comrade's corpse.”

It was an immediate reflex that occurred before his head had time to think. People had known him to be selfish, but he was also known to take care of his own.

But due to his actions, the previously calm burial chamber began to stir. The mood of Marakia, the King of the Nahaks, had shifted. A dark and chilly air flowed from Marakia who had been quiet and agreeable despite his title as the Last King.

“You dare kill one of my people in front of me?”

Marakia grew enraged. Mimi who had been hunched over in front of him was wearing a meaningful smile beneath him.

‘Great!’

Willie realized that he had made a critical error, and to make matters worse, a being appeared from the shadows that he wished to never meet again. The Despair of the Abyss revealed himself as though he had been here from the beginning.

“T-that thing!”

His followers who had already had their share of troubles due to the creature immediately turned their gaze away from it.

“ ... ”

Sungchul silently looked at his surroundings. Marakia was in the center of the room, Mimi was hunched over beneath him, Willie and his followers were at the entrance, the Despair of the Abyss sat in a shaded corner while he stood in the middle of them all. All the key figures within the Underground Kingdom had gathered in one spot. When it rains it pours, and this powder keg was ready to explode.

Marakia moved first.

“Which race rules the world now?”

He coldly asked Mimi who lay at his feet. Mimi answered while still in her grovelling pose.

“Several races share dominion, but the most dominating among them... are humans.”

“Is that so?”

Marakia let out a cold laughter. His starry eyes were looking directly at Willie.

“Those that crawled the ground when we flew the skies have now become arrogant because they managed to gather some strength. To dare treat the subject of the King of Nahaks in such a manner.”

“ ... ”

Willie began to retreat slowly but looked ready to pull out his sword anytime. Marakia who had seen this mocked him.

“Do you truly believe that you could harm a feather on my body with a cheap toy like that?”

“...It is true that I have harmed one of your subjects, but it is also true that your young subject had desecrated the corpse of my subordinate.”

Willie did not back down an inch, and the avian king broke out into laughter.

“The creatures that had once crawled on the ground as prey are now barking so indignantly. Human, I will let you experience again the fear that had since been forgotten.”

Marakia’s wings burst open. The massive magic power instilled within his black wings flooded the room, creating a suffocating atmosphere that felt ready to crumble.

“I shall leave this place and lay waste to each and every human nation and drive them towards extinction. I shall burn the unworthy to death with the flames of purification, and the human kings will be forced to watch as I devour their own livers in front of them. If I repeat this enough times, the human race may remember once more, what these black wings symbolize.”

‘Things escalated quickly’ thought Mimi as she continued to lay bowed with her head to the ground at the king’s feet. Meanwhile, Willie Gilford who was receiving the full force of the avian king’s rage with his body felt extreme terror.

‘This isn’t an opponent for me.’

What stood in front of him exuded so much oppressive strength that it relegated the Despair of the Abyss as some bystander.

‘Maybe if I gathered all 13 Continental Champions... but I can’t do this by myself.’

He had wiped clean all notions of taking the bodies of his son or his comrade with him. Survival was always first.

These thoughts were running through his mind as he clenched his sword tighter, but Marakia’s wings suddenly moved. Marakia flew up to the ceiling with a single flap, and Willie, who could see the black wings of the Nahak King, couldn’t fathom what he should do next. Soon, the air above burst into feathers and beams of black light.

‘It is similar to Glare, but not quite the same. It’s a more powerful version of Magic Arrow.’

Sungchul silently watched the two battle. Willie swung his sword to parry the projectiles or evaded them completely, but the deadly

magical arrows continued to pour like rain, causing small and large cuts all over his body. His followers were long since dead within the confusion of the battle.

“Gasp... Gasp...”

There was no way to retaliate for Willie. He would simply be whittled to death at his rate, and it was too much of a risk to leap toward the avian king.

‘A way... is there no way at all? Something most likely to succeed?’

One had to stake it all for an all-or-nothing fight. Willie had only involved himself when the odds were with him. This was his first fight where the odds were against him from the start. He attempted a counterattack within the baptism of countless arrows, but it was already far too late as his body was exhausted and riddled with injuries. He was struck in the abdomen with a black magic arrow, and he fell. It was his last leg.

Willie wiped his lips and tried to catch his breath. The shadow of death was looming over him.

“You insect.”

The avian king gradually descended to end the life of the Seventh Continental Champion personally. A short staff that looked more like a pitchfork rather than a blade appeared in his hand. It was

the Sceptre of the Avian King.

Marakia approached Willie who was desperately gasping for breath on the floor and raised the sceptre above him.

“Die.”

It was at that moment when a man appeared before them. A man that had such a small presence that everyone had forgotten him, and in his hands was a hammer. It was Sungchul.

The man that had naturally stepped in to block the avian king's path approached Willie and spoke in a calm voice.

“Willie Gilford. Do you remember me?”

Chapter 73 – Echoes (1)

“Who are you?”

It was an unfamiliar face, but when Willie noticed the hammer in this strange man’s hands, he recalled where he had seen the man. It was in front of the Demon King’s Palace. It was the man that had been spouting off curses towards the glittering stars that were the champions of the Other World.

‘Sungchul, the Enemy of the World? No... How could it be? His face is different. He looks younger than before, and his physique is different as well.’

The most important aspect wasn’t his face, but rather the Divine Weapon, Fal Garaz, that he held in his hands. Sungchul looked down on Willie with a chilly gaze and opened his mouth again.

“You haven’t changed at all in 8 years. Or rather, you might have regressed.”

At that moment, Marakia shot down dozens of magical arrows from the sky like rain. Sungchul struck the earth with his hammer. The surface cracked, and an entire bedrock popped out. He held it in place with just one hand. The bedrock was as large as a house, but the hand which held it up was unwavering.

Pewt! Pewt! Pewt Pewt Pewt!

Multiple Magic arrows landed on the bedrock, but none managed to penetrate it all the way through. After he had managed to block the first round of attacks, Sungchul threw the bedrock and mightily swung his hammer. It caused a massive air pressure to gather followed by the sound of an explosion. The Avian King was temporarily disoriented due to taking the resulting wind head on, and the bedrock Sungchul launched into the air came crashing down to the ground.

Boom!

The ground shook wildly, but what shook even more was the Seventh Champion of the Continent's eyes.

‘What is that strength? I knew that he forsook everything for the sake of physical stats, but that strength... where does it come from?’

For a moment a goal that he once chased but have long since come to accept as infeasible popped into his mind.

‘Could it be... did that man exceed superhuman levels and step into the realm of transcendence?’

Transcendent One. It is the highest attainable state for a mortal. There are only three individuals who are known to have transcended to this level of strength currently. The First Champion of the Continent, Emperor William Quinton Marlboro. The Second Champion of the Continent, Mediator Aquiroa. And the Fifth Champion of the Continent, leader of the Assassin's Guild

Shamal Rajput.

Sungchul who had been the 10th Champion of the Continent was known as a powerful warrior, but he was too simple. People believed his upper limits were all too clear. He had no particular skills or techniques and chose to throw himself into battle with just his own body. This method was crude and predictable.

‘Could it be that that guy overcame his limits?’

Suddenly, Willie spat out a glob of blood from his throat and curled up like a shrimp. It was because the shadow of death was looming over him.

Stomp.

Sungchul’s military boots stopped close to his face.

“Selfishness has clouded your judgement and made you fall into the pitfall called complacency.”

Konk.

Fal Garaz’s head fell lightly onto the ground’s surface.

“Look well, Willie Gilford. This is how the Enemy of the World fights.”

Sungchul ran out with his hammer in hand. Willie, who didn't even have the strength to move a finger, couldn't do much else than to watch Sungchul fight while his head still sat on the ground forcing him to breathe in the loose dirt.

When the battle began, Willie fell into a huge shock. Sungchul and Marakia were fighting to a standstill. No... Sungchul had an air of leisure about him. It was unbelievable. A summoned, a mortal was fighting evenly with a figure of legends.

‘Sungchul. He was definitely weaker than me. Just how did he manage to get his hands on such massive power? And... and for what reason?’

Sungchul's words were exact. While Willie had become complacent after obtaining the title of ‘Regent of the Ancient Kingdom’ and the Seventh Champion of the Continent, Sungchul had become unfathomably stronger. He was most likely forced to fight and struggle to survive every day for eight years, to the point where death would have been a much kinder fate.

“Receive the fury of the skies!”

Marakia formed several magic formations all across the ceiling and summoned a part of a storm cloud to cause lightning to strike down with abandon. It was a terrifying magical attack that hadn't been seen before, but Sungchul's response was quite simple. He rapidly smashed Fal Garaz into the bedrock, shattering the ground around him causing the debris to float up into the air. He then struck the floating chunks of the bedrock faster than the eyes could see, launching them towards and destroying every magic

formation Marakia had created, even scattering the thunderclouds that had formed.

Marakia was impressive, but Sungchul's response was simply breathtaking.

‘Just how did that man... for what reason did he reach that level...’

In that moment, Willie's sight began to fade. Death was soon approaching him. All he could hear was the sound of battle, and even that was starting to grow distant. Within the tranquil darkness, Willie laid dying in humiliation and regret. The last thing he heard was Marakia's outburst.

“You lowly pest of a human!”

It was an all-out attack. Marakia covered himself with his wings as he uttered an evil accursed spell with his beak into his black feathers, then spread his wings wide apart. His entire body began to emit a black magical aura that swept through the entire Underground Kingdom like a torrent causing all the corpses caught within to reawaken.

Clack. Clack. Clack.

The countless Cave Elves buried within the wall broke through and began to stumble forth. It was an undead army of thousands... no, tens of thousands.

“My slaves. Exterminate that vulgar insect!”

The skeletal army began to rush towards Sungchul like a river.

“....”

Sungchul stood his ground and watched the tidal wave of skeletons overwhelm him while Marakia looked over the scene from the ceiling with his arms crossed.

The river of white skeletons quickly began to surround Sungchul and eventually enveloped him entirely. These dead beings had the magical ability to drain the life force of the living simply by being near them. What would happen if dozens or even hundreds of insignificant powers began to drain all at once? No human warrior, no matter how powerful, would be able to withstand the onslaught. Marakia’s skeleton army also numbered in the tens of thousands. It might have helped to have wings to fly, but those without the ability of fly would be simply doomed to die without a struggle.

However, tremors began to rumble within the mass of skeletons. Marakia’s eyes caught something moving.

Sweck~

Within the river of white below his feet, something small and also white began to fly over in his direction.

Fwik! Fwik!

Something sharp flew past where he flew and became embedded into the wall. Marakia turned his head to take a look at what it was. They were fragments of bone.

Boom!

Another muffled tremor exploded below him followed by the sound of the air splitting that shocked him to his core.

‘Did that bastard actually?!’

Marakia could not hold back his surprise and quickly descended. Skeletal fragments shot out like a shotgun and embedded themselves everywhere.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The mobs of skeletons began to burst out in turns. More fragments flew toward Marakia than he had expected.

“Urk!”

One of the fragments caused an injury. The wound wasn’t deep, but it bled and caused ripples of pain. Marakia began to tremble. He was a Nahak; a race believed to be chosen by God. He was also

the most revered and powerful among the Nahaks, but he was injured by a mere human.

However, that attack was only the beginning.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Consecutive muffled explosions resonated from the mass of skeletons.

‘Just what kind of person is this? Why is he fine while being surrounded by the Army of Death?’

He had been the one showering black arrows like rain, but now he was on the receiving end being exposed to the flying fragments of bone. Marakia now stood at a crossroad.

‘Do I release the Army of Death and put up a defensive barrier? If I do that, I’ll lose one of my methods of attack. The might of the Army of Death isn’t explosive, but it is unending. No matter how strong that human is, there is no way he’ll be able to endure the Army of Death indefinitely.’

Marakia was a powerful mage, but he was also a powerful warrior. He also had more confidence than anyone in his ability to fly. He looked down on the ground as he sustained the Army of Death.

Boom!

Another explosion. A shotgun of bone fragments began to fly out. Marakia tracked every fragment and began to maneuver in the air. With a single flap, he majestically and agilely tore through the air to evade every fragment.

Boom! Boom!

Sungchul, who was buried within the skeletons, continued to shoot out fragments.

‘He is struggling, but his attacks will not work on me!’

Marakia had faith in his wings and the precision of his eyes; he continued to evade the attacks easily.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

Bones continued to fly towards him. Marakia put on a beautiful display of flight as he continued to evade the fragments, but as he dodged the fragments for the third time, another attack popped out at an odd timing. Marakia scoffed at him and descended quickly.

‘Do you think these kinds of attacks will work?’

The fragment flew by harmlessly over his head, and with that, Marakia was confident in his victory. But the moment he had

lowered his altitude to dodge the projectiles, something shot out of the pile of skeletons like a bullet. It happened so suddenly that Marakia could not respond in time.

‘Could it be?’

He had a good guess of what had happened to him. The attack which he thought he had easily evaded was actually meant to drive him into a checkmate.

Grip!

A human hand gripped onto the avian king’s wing. Marakia quickly tried to shake the human off, but the human hand was faster.

Riiiip!

The rough grip proceeded to separate his wing from his body. Following the traumatic pain shooting through his body, a fountain of blood shot out from the wound. Marakia’s vision grew dim as he fell towards the ground. What appeared next in his sights was the Army of Death that he had raised himself. Corpses of Cave Elves, ones on whom he wouldn’t even waste the words ‘lowly’ on, began to envelop him as he lost consciousness.

Boom!

The avian king crashed in the middle of the mass of skeletons.

The skeletons that had been animated due to the king's power began to collapse as they lost their source of power. Sungchul lightly landed onto the surface made of bones. His usual appearance remained intact without a single injury nor clothing out of place.

“...”

He turned his head and looked back towards a specific spot. Wille who had been lying in that place could no longer be seen under a mound of skeletons of nameless Cave Elves. It was a pitiful end to someone praised as the Seventh Champion of the Continent as well as the only one in over 500 years to have achieved the rank of Grand Swordmaster.

Sungchul walked over slowly toward Marakia who was lying on top of the skeletal mound.

“Uuu... Kuuu...”

Marakia, who had one of his wings torn off, was trembling and groaning from pain. The sound of Sungchul's military boots grew closer and closer. And for the first time in his life, Marakia felt fear blossom in his heart. He pushed aside the pain and immediately flipped himself over to look at the man who was silently approaching him with his violet eyes.

‘How could this be? This doesn't make sense. This strength that I acquired at the cost of my entire race and era couldn't overcome this lowly human?’

Sungchul continued to walk towards him. The avian king had to swallow the insult of having to use his two arms and legs to crawl on his back to postpone the destined moment. He suddenly had a thought.

‘That’s right. This guy can only resort to physical attacks.’

Within his body was near infinite amounts of magic power. The problem was that the vessel of this immense magical power had sustained a critical injury. At his current state, it was impossible to heal this on his own. He needed something he could immediately use. A potion or another living creature.

Marakia who was now crawling on his back caught something in his sights. It was a human. The female magician that had claimed to have revived him. He may have been reawakened by that woman, but humans were nothing more than a snack to Marakia.

‘That looks good. The mage would also work great as nourishment.’

Marakia was capable of sacrificing his own subjects; it would be impossible to expect mercy from him toward another race entirely. His eyes were that of a predator looking at his prey.

“W-What...?!”

Mimi quickly figured out the intent behind Marakia’s gaze

toward her, but by then, it was all too late. The sharp beak tore through her flesh and became lodged into her heart. Marakia's throat gulped down the warm blood of a freshly killed human.

“ ... ”

Sungchul only watched the scene with an indifferent expression.

Chapter 74 – Echoes (2)

Sungchul stood in front of Marakia, then raised Fal Garaz onto his shoulders as he spoke.

“I heard that you were in the class of lesser gods, but I guess you haven’t quite gotten there yet.”

“...What do you want?”

Marakia wiped the blood from his beak as he spoke with a disgusted face. Sungchul looked down at the avian king apathetically as he held his hand out.

“Crown.”

The Crown of the Nahak King was believed to possess an unimaginable amount of magic power. The crown was the sole reason that Sungchul hadn’t already torn Marakia to shreds. However, Marakia appeared as though it was the first time he heard of a Nahak crown.

“The King of Nahaks don’t wear crowns. The color of their feathers symbolize their royalty, and also...”

Marakia quickly recited a spell that caused a mysterious square barrier to form around him. He then laughed loudly within his barrier.

“Kuhahaha! I’ve already caught on the fact that physical attacks are all that you’re good at. You will not be able to break through this barrier as long as my unlimited mana endures!”

Sungchul picked up his hammer and took a swing at the barrier as a test. There was no recoil from the blow, but the hammer moved not one inch beyond the barrier. Sungchul’s Soul Contract, the Eye of Truth, activated which let him peek into the nature of the barrier.

‘A barrier technique that nullifies all physical attacks. It could even be sustained for as long as the caster desires.’

In other words, it was the perfect defense. However, it is impossible for mortals to make something perfect. Marakia had to place a critical weakness in exchange for a perfectly sustainable defense against physical damage. Sungchul’s Soul Contract, the Eye of Truth, activated which let him peek into the nature of the barrier.

‘The barrier can nullify all physical attacks, but he had to include a form of weakness, so he increased his vulnerability to magic by several times.’

In other words, even the weakest of spells would become quite powerful through that barrier. That was the vulnerability placed within his own technique. It was because the power of the spell increased proportionally to how crippling the weakness was and so Marakia took advantage of this method.

This could have been effective a year ago, but Sungchul had gone through a similar ordeal and had been looking far and wide for a method to break through this obstacle. Now was the moment of truth, to find out if his efforts were not in vain.

Sungchul put down his hammer and extended his finger.

“Glare.”

A magic formation flashed for an instant at the tip of his finger. Marakia’s violet eyes grew wide as he saw this.

‘That bastard. He can use magic too?’

In the next moment, a beam of light extended from the tip of Sungchul’s finger directly onto Marakia.

“Keuk!”

He used his last remaining wing to shield his body from the piercing light from Glare. Bone-numbing pain scraped through his entire body. The situation weakened him and empowered the enemy; it was the worst case scenario. But Marakia was not just anybody. He who is called the Last King calmly calculated and assessed the situation despite it being seemingly hopeless.

‘This guy’s magic power is insignificant. It’s a low-grade magic that doesn’t even reach the third circle. It might hurt like I’m dying, but this isn’t lethal.’

As he expected, Sungchul's magic attack stung, but it didn't leave a mortal wound. It was due to Marakia's exceptionally high magic resistance. Generally, magicians with extraordinarily high magic power would have equally remarkable levels of magic resistance. Marakia was no exception. His magic resistance reached the levels only a transcendent could, around 600. Most half-assed magic wouldn't even be enough to put a scratch on him. If they hadn't been in this underground maze, the magic resistance that covered his entire body might have nullified the spell entirely. He sustained this much of an injury because he was within the barrier and because he was in the underground labyrinth overflowing with mana.

He thanked the corpses of Mimi Azrael and her Homunculus that were sprawled out in the corner and refocused on the battle. A shadow wrapped around the burnt flesh that Sungchul's Glare had seared, and it quickly healed.

'If I didn't go through emergency measures by eating those two beasts, it might have been really dangerous.'

Sungchul was pouring in Glare from beyond the barrier. Marakia felt intense pain on every strike, but the shadow continued to heal him every time.

“...”

Sungchul felt annoyed.

‘This bastard. He recovered his Magic Fingerprint.’

When Sungchul tore away Marakia’s wing, he felt that he had torn away one of the pillars that supported Marakia’s magic system. However, it had recovered after Marakia devoured Mimi and the homunculus.’

“Why did you just watch him eat that pitiful Homunculus and that rotten woman?”

Bertelgia had popped out of his pocket at some point to ask the burning question. Sungchul lightly sighed.

“I wanted to see the potential.”

“The potential?”

“....”

Sungchul didn’t reply. Instead, he circled around Marakia who was still behind the barrier and tried Glare several more times. Marakia spat out cries of pain, but as time passed, he regained his confidence and began mocking Sungchul where it hurt.

“Your flesh might be fearsome, but your magic is pathetic. This place might be overflowing with mana, but how long can you continue to fire off blindly with your pathetic amount of magical talent?”

He had a point. Sungchul had also been thinking on that point, and he knew the answer. He pulled out a sleeping bag from his Soul Storage and laid it out on top of the skeletons. Marakia, who did not know what a sleeping bag was, watched puzzled as to what Sungchul was up to until Sungchul lay down on it.

‘Wait, is this human planning to...’

His speculation soon became a reality when Sungchul turned his back and spoke in a composed voice.

“It’s ok. I’ve got a lot of time. I’ll just take a snooze and knock on you some more afterwards.”

It wasn’t just empty words. Marakia could feel the truth in his voice. That stupid oaf with more brawn than brain would never give up before he got what he wanted. And thus, Marakia asked the question.

“I do not have a crown. But if there is anything other than the crown that I can give, I wish to make a deal with you. What is it that you desire, human?”

Sungchul, who was facing away from Marakia, turned his head over his shoulder. He looked at Marakia indifferently and put forward his demand.

“Magic Power.”

“Magic Power?”

“That’s right. I know another sneaky little bastard like you, and I think both of you are very similar. I want to get rid of him with magic.”

“Are you perhaps telling me to give you my magic power?”

“Anything is fine. Magic power or relic. As long as it’s acceptable to me, I’ll take it.”

Sungchul said as he laid back down.

Marakia closed his beak and began to contemplate. Something acceptable. The weight of those words fell heavy on Marakia’s shoulders. The human in front of his eyes was an existence that even he could not contend with. How much would such a person require before he could be satisfied?

‘Could it be... does this human want my entire magic power?’

In other words, stat transference. Dreadful suspicion rose in Marakia’s eyes as he continued to contemplate what this human could possibly want.

There were largely two ways through which a being transferred stats to another being. One was through quests, but the creation of

a quest required a long time and effort as it required the permission of a god and the stats that could be given were limited. In order to hand over the acceptable amount of plentiful stats, it required another method. It was Soul Inheritance.

But this method had a dreadful consequence

It results in the death of the one giving his stats.

The Soul Inheritance required strong will, desire and the death of the giver. This was considered as the greatest form of inheritance a denizen of the other world could leave for their posterity.

Even if the amount of stat that could be transferred via Soul Inheritance was roughly a tenth of the sacrifice's original stats, being able to raise stats by even one for those who are close to becoming Transcendent was an immense boon. But as already stated, this method requires the death of the one transferring the stat; a prerequisite Marakia could never come to accept.

‘Do you really think I would hand over my Soul Inheritance to some lesser species like you, who's not even of my kin?’

No, he wouldn't even hand it over to his kin. Marakia corrected himself before calming himself within the barrier.

‘First, I have to heal my wounds in here till my wings recover. Once my wings recover, I'll find a way, human. I'll show you that time is not only on your side.’

At that moment, something beyond his sight began to stir. It was the green monster with the avian skull that was covered in mucous. It was the Despair of the Abyss.

‘Why did that cursed creature appear in my kingdom? It is also in the form of the Nahak. Strange? My kingdom had no connection with the Ancient God.’

The Despair of the Abyss dug through the skeletons that blanketed the ground to seek out a single corpse. It was Willie Gilford’s corpse. The creature lifted the corpse, opened its maw, then swallowed his body whole. It was an unrealistic scene that couldn’t be believed, and it sent shivers down Marakia’s body.

Sungchul rose from his knapsack a bit later. After feeling a bit rested, he began shooting out Glare without warning. Marakia continued to endure Sungchul’s attack and ultimately managed to protect himself. This continued for a while longer until Sungchul realized that he was making no progress.

‘Do I have to bring Deckard? No, he’s too weak. He might crumble to some mental attack before he can use any magic.’

Sungchul rethought his plans as he turned to his rectangular friend.

“Bertelgia.”

“Hm? Why do you seek me, Bertelgia, O’ Mr. Scary Scary Man?”

“Do you know any way to resolve this situation?”

Marakia who was hunched over within the barrier lifted his head to see Bertelgia flapping behind Sungchul.

‘Is that a living book? Wait, now that I look at it, it’s not just a normal living book. I can feel a faint trace of life force and a soul within.’

Curiosity rose within Marakia’s eyes as he could hear Berltegia’s voice from afar.

“Mmmm... how about you keep bashing at it with your hammer? That bird brain’s mana can’t be infinite, so just keep bashing away at it until it breaks.”

“Wait!”

Marakia’s voice interrupted her.

“Do you think that method will work? My mana is infinite.”

At that, Bertelgia flapped around Sungchul meekly as though pitying Marakia as she spoke.

“Well, this mister’s strength is also infinite.”

“Ah, that’s a good idea.”

Sungchul picked up Fal Garaz once again, and fear rose within Marakia’s eyes.

‘Shit.’

Bertelgia’s words were correct. He may call his mana infinite, but it was something earned through the death of tens of thousands of Cave Elves and the lives of his own kind. There was an end.

However, what about the man that stood in front of him? It wasn’t clear how he obtained his strength, but each and every strike of his hammer seemed to possess the might of a god. What would happen if infinite mana contended with infinite strength? Marakia already knew the answer.

Stomp.

Sungchul stood before the barrier with his hammer in hand. Marakia’s eyes grew wide, but Sungchul stopped and placed the hammer before the barrier.

“On second thought, I want to use a different method.”

It was an unexpected opportunity. Sungchul wanted to dominate

the avian king through a method other than his own strength.

Marakia fought with all his strength to maintain his expression, but the danger had not yet passed for him. When Sungchul put down the hammer, he asked Bertelgia another question.

“Bertelgia, do you know of any way to enhance magic in your alchemic library?”

“Why wouldn’t there be?”

Bertelgia spun up into the air with vigor as she answered. Marakia felt intense desire to tear apart that chattering book in the air, but despite his wishes, Bertelgia’s mouth did not rest.

“There is a drink and a powder. Which do you prefer?”

“Doping, eh? I personally don’t like strengthening up temporarily by drinking. I’m not weak.”

“How about the powder?”

“It is a type of item that lowers enemy magic resistance?”

“No, it is a powder that enhances the might of the magic.”

“The description itself does not seem all that promising.”

“What a rude thing to say! It’s one of the popular items that the Seven Heroes that you like so much came to dad’s shop for!”

“Hoh?”

Sungchul’s eyes lit up. The method didn’t sound all that promising, but if the Seven Heroes used it, it was another story. Sungchul felt like things were going his way as he asked in a slightly different tone.

“And the ingredients?”

It was the critical problem with alchemy. No matter how good of an Alchemist you are, your hands are tied without the ingredients. Thankfully, there wasn’t an issue this time.

Bertelgia flew above Sungchul’s head as she flapped her pages with one swoop.

“All the ingredients aren’t here, but the critical pieces are lying around here. Yep, it’s those things sparkling above your head.”

Sungchul looked up. Above his head, gems emitting a green light were stuck to the ceiling like stars in the night sky.

Chapter 75 – Echoes (3)

Marakia watched Sungchul and his living book craft something from his self-made prison. Sungchul pulled out Eckheart's portable Alchemic cauldron first. It was usually in a miniature form that would fit into a pocket, but once a hidden feature was activated, it grew to a massive size that even three adults might struggle to move. This was one of the inventions Eckhart had created based on his theory of how Soul Storages worked.

Sungchul crushed the rock with a green glow from the ceiling into the Alchemic cauldron. An ordinary Alchemist might require tools such as a mortar or a mill, but it was unnecessary for Sungchul.

“Now, keep crushing those glowing rocks into powder-yeyo!”

Bertelgia continued chattering away beside him.

“Why are you mimicking a Homunculus?”

Sungchul, who didn't particularly like the homunculi, glared at Bertelgia as he asked curtly. However, Bertelgia must not have felt particularly threatened.

“It is not a homunculi-yeyo! I am mimicking a fairy-yeyo!”

She continued to imitate a homunculus. Sungchul crushed another glowing rock with his grip as he spoke again.

“If you keep at it, I will stuff you back into the storage.”

It was a calm voice, but he was a man of his words. Bertelgia immediately stopped.

“O...ok-yeyo!”

Some time had passed, and a considerable amount of glowing green powder was amassed inside the cauldron.

“What now?”

“Ahem. The glowing rocks possess powerful mana of their own. In other words, it is emitting light on its own due to its abundant mana! We can learn two things from this! Can you guess what they are?”

“ ... ”

Sungchul was about to tell her to cut to the chase, but he internally fixed his attitude and began to contemplate on the answer to her question.

“The glowing rocks must be capable of storing mana.”

“And the other?”

“Mmm...”

“Why does it emit light on its own?”

“Not only can it store mana, but it can also emit the stored mana in some form?”

“Exactly!”

Bertelgia let out a whistle as she flew around Sungchul once.

“Well, I did give you a hint in the end.”

Sungchul grabbed a handful of the glowing rock powder and took a whiff. It was to activate the Observation ability of the Alchemists. However, the powder was already an Alchemic item created through some ingredients and not an ingredient on its own. Sungchul grabbed one of the intact glowing rocks and stared at it piercingly. An information screen regarding the green glowing rocks appeared before him.

[Glowing Rock (Green)]

Level: 4

Grade: B

Attribute: Earth

Type: Valuable

Effect: A gem capable of emitting a green light on its own

“It is a level 4 Alchemic Item.”

It was a rather high-level item when taking into consideration that Alchemists capable of creating level 5 items were called professors.

“Yep, correct. It’s a level 4 Alchemic item. The ingredients are fairly rare, and the method of creating them is quite intricate. Looking at how they were able to fill the ceiling with them like stars in the sky, I suppose the legends about the Nahak race wasn’t for nothing.”

When she finished speaking, a sharp laughter could be heard from the other side of the cauldron. It was Marakia within the barrier.

“We, the Nahaks, are one of the most noble of the mortal races. This Underground Kingdom is but one of countless wonders we’ve created. To be surprised by mere glowing stones that serve only as decorations within this palace. Truly absurd.”

He was like a bird trapped in a cage, but his pride had yet to fall. He had lost, but the belief that the Nahak race didn’t share in this loss remained iron-clad in his heart.

Bertelgia looked over at his mocking figure and retorted bluntly.

“So what? They’ve fallen now.”

“Fallen? The Nahak race? Hahaha! Don’t make me laugh, you pitiful book shaped human.”

“Who are you calling pitiful? You birdbrain!”

“My eyes see all. Even that pitiable and pathetic form hidden under the guise of what is visible.”

“Oh, yeah? What do you see?”

Bertelgia snorted, and when she did, Marakia made a sinister smile and looked piercingly toward her. His purple iris contained several complex and exotic magic formations which were shuffling among themselves until one of them rose to the surface and remained fixed in place. It was the All Seeing Eye that saw through all things.

‘Now let’s see.’

He first looked at Bertelgia. A faint figure was lingering behind her appearance as a large book. It was a human girl with a slim stature. The girl had both her eyes closed and was hunched over like a fetus.

‘So that is the true form of the book. She must be hiding her true

form in the space between reality and the netherworld and interacting with the world by projecting a false appearance. Truly a complex and creative magic technique for a mere human. I praise thee.'

Marakia's gaze turned toward Sungchul next, but the moment his All Seeing Eye locked onto Sungchul, his beak went slack.

'W...what is that...?!'

All strength in his body left him, and he felt enough trauma to give him a heart attack briefly. Marakia immediately turned away. It was because he saw within the man's body something that mortals were forbidden from seeing. His heart still showed no sign of settling down.

"Hey, human."

After quite a bit of time had passed, Marakia spoke with a trembling voice. Sungchul, who was stirring the cauldron with a large spoon, turned his gaze toward Marakia. Marakia tensed up when their gaze met, and spoke in a sonorous voice.

"Just what are you planning?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Just what are you planning by bearing that horrible burden onto your flesh?"

“ ... ”

Sungchul was silent, but Marakia's eyes grew fierce and continued with the questioning.

“You. You've stood before a god, haven't you?”

Sungchul finally replied in a calm voice.

“What are you trying to say?”

Marakia laughed weakly and lightly moved his remaining wing. When a single black feather fell slowly onto the floor, he spoke again.

“Me? I don't have much to say. I have been nicknamed the Final King, but I still was unworthy to stand before a god. Though I do know one thing.”

Marakia spoke on in a low voice filled with dread.

“That all who stand before a god meet a tragic end.”

“ ... ”

“The sin of seeing what mortals must never see. The sin of

hearing what must not be heard. Finally, the sin of trying to speak of what must not be spoken. It is an age-old teaching that those who commit these sins will face divine punishment far worse than death and the punishment will extend to all eternity.”

Marakia began to laugh like a madman when he finished. Sungchul continued to stir the cauldron silently as he laughed, and a bright light began to pour out of the cauldron soon after.

[Synthesis Success!]

Sungchul took the final product out of the cauldron. It was a pitch black crystal that seemed to be made of darkness itself. The crystal without lustre felt cold as ice and heavy as a lump of iron. Bertelgia approached the final product and began to observe it. Soon her judgement was made.

“Ahem. Quite good. I only taught you the basic methods, and you managed to make a level 4 item.”

Sungchul immediately began to inspect the black crystal in his hand.

[Black Crystal]
Level: 4
Grade: C

Attribute: Fire

Type: Magic Tool

Note: If dispersed as a powder, spells passing through it will be amplified.

“So it was like that.”

He looked at the Black Crystal as he spoke.

“That is how it is. Alchemy isn’t just for making something new, but also turning something into something else.”

Sungchul stared at the Black Crystal in his hand once again. The glowing crystal that was shining brilliantly now had a dull black surface that seemed to absorb all light. It had only taken but a simple alchemic process to bring about the polar opposite characteristic of this object. Sungchul had felt that the alchemic process had consumed significant amounts of mana, but he took it as a test of his newfound magical prowess.

“Now. Marakia. I’ll be starting up again. It’ll be different this time.”

“Give me your best shot. One who stood before a god.” taunted Marakia from within the barrier.

Crunch.

The Black Crystal became crushed in his hand and turned into fragments. Sungchul waved his hand with the fragments toward Marakia. The fragments in his hand turned to powder and were dispersed around Marakia's surroundings.

"It's not even funny. Do you think anything will change with but a simple powder?"

Marakia continued to taunt him, but Bertelgia lightly shook her body from behind Sungchul and muttered angrily toward him.

"It might sting a wee bit more this time!"

Sungchul's finger was extended toward Marakia within the black dust of the crystal.

'Glare.'

He recited the incantation of the spell in his head. A beam of light containing the power of the skies shot out from his fingertip towards Marakia. It wasn't much different than before up to this point, but everything changed once the beam of light began to interact with the black powder floating about in the air.

As the thin strand of light passed through the gap between the particles of the black powder, it grew thicker and brighter as it transformed mightily. Even Marakia could see the change that had occurred within an instant.

‘What’s this? The magic is being amplified again?!’

The beam of light pierced through his barrier and directly struck him.

“Kuuek!”

Marakia tried to protect himself with his last remaining wing, but the beam penetrated the wing and struck his body. He immediately felt immense trauma and pain coursing through his body, but Marakia continued to callously calculate the damage and the rate of his recovery even through the pain.

‘I can hold on from this much. I can hold on!’

Sungchul was also thinking the same thing. His magic power had been amplified through the black crystal, but it wasn’t enough to bring Marakia to his knees. Even if the difference between victory and defeat was paper thin, the difference in the consequence was night and day. He needed something different. Something more to supplement his power, but something to amplify his magic power in this moment didn’t exist.

The beam of light gradually became thinner. It meant that the effect of Glare was running out. The dark presence that was held within Marakia’s body continued to heal him rapidly even at this moment. It wouldn’t be enough to bend his will even if another Glare was cast.

Deep regret passed through Sungchul's eyes.

'Is this my limit?'

It was at that moment when Sungchul's magic became drastically drained, and a bright message appeared before his eyes.

[The first Echo.]

When the message appeared, another beam of light replaced the fading beam with even more strength and ferocity than before. It wasn't caused by another Aria. The magic had manifested itself as though it was sentient. When Sungchul saw this, he instantly recalled a class that he had relegated to the back of his mind. The Echo Mage class.

One of the Seven Heroes of legend, Vestiare's echo overcame the immense gap of time and had manifested itself into the world through Sungchul.

'Is this an echo...?!'

This new beam of light that had swallowed up the fading beam critically struck Marakia's recovering wing consecutively.

“What’s this?!”

Marakia’s eyes grew wide as plates. It might have been different if there had been a pause between attacks, but it was another attack even before the first one could end. This was beyond any of his expectations. To make things worse, Sungchul recited another spell in his mind.

‘Glare.’

The finger that was already shooting out a beam of light shot out another beam. He felt his mana hit rock bottom, but Sungchul did not relent. The fading beam of light, the second beam born from within the first, and a third new beam of light all struck Marakia’s body at the same time. When all three instances of Glare attacked the avian king’s body simultaneously, even the being called the Final King could not bear it much longer.

“S-stop! Stop!!! I concede! Stop!!!”

The urgent shouts of defeat rang out in the tomb, and the barrier collapsed. Sungchul stood before the king of Nahaks sitting defenseless on his knees.

“Now, I will have what I came for.”

Chapter 76 – The King’s Request (1)

“Just what do you want? The only thing I can’t hand over is the Soul Inheritance. I’d rather choose death.”

Marakia was feeling hopeless.

In a crumpled posture and with voice lacking energy, his appearance revealed the despair which had settled in his heart.

Sungchul gazed upon Marakia in such a state and spoke in a calm voice.

“I never asked for the Soul Inheritance. I would happily receive it if it was offered, but what I want is an adequate increase in Magic Power and Intuition. Just those two things.”

“Aren’t I in this state because I can’t give you those things? You should clearly know how ineffective and difficult it is to raise a stat of someone of your level.”

“Is there truly no crown? Something that would grant power by wielding it?”

Sungchul had already suspected that Mimi had made up the story about the crown of the Nahak King, but he asked once again with a fleeting hope. Unrealistic expectations were always meant to be broken. Marakia shook his head.

“I told you there is no such thing. This is the truth.”

“I see.”

It was all futile. He had spent a great deal of effort in subjugating Marakia to his will, but he had gained nothing from it. However, nothing could be done if the other was not willing to give. It is easy to kill someone, but it was impossible to steal their inherent power and accomplishments.

“I have nothing to give you, but if you desire, I can perform a ritual that might supplement your power.”

Marakia spoke feebly as he noticed the stony expression on Sungchul’s face. Sungchul turned his head slightly.

“What kind of ritual?”

At this, Marakia made a sinister expression as he answered.

“Haven’t you already seen it? What occurred to the Underground Kingdom?”

“Are you asking me to offer a sacrifice?”

Marakia nodded.

“I see that there are countless Cave Elves still lingering in the Underground Kingdom. If you offer their lives to a god as sacrifice, wouldn't it be enough to get what you desire?”

“....”

Sungchul shook his head.

“Why? Why refuse this?”

Marakia couldn't understand at all. He had given Sungchul the greatest offer that he could muster, and Sungchul had denied it without a second thought. Sungchul immediately gave his reply.

“Unlike you, I do not wish to sacrifice the lives of others for the sake of power.”

“I thought you were wise, but it seems you still cling to a bit of your naivety. Why concern yourself with the lives of a lesser race that is not even your own?”

Sungchul didn't respond to that question. No, he didn't feel that the question needed an answer. The gap between their thoughts on this subject could not be closed. Instead, Bertelgia answered during Sungchul's silence.

“Even the noble race that you're so proud of are no more thanks to you.”

“What? They are no more? How can you utter such nonsense while I still stand?”

“It looks like you still aren’t aware of what had happened to your people.”

As Bertelgia and Marakia continued their meaningless debate, Sungchul took a step back and began to contemplate on his next steps.

‘Is training the only method? If I use him, I should be able to gain at least some... no wait.’

A thought crossed Sungchul’s mind. His eyes turned toward Marakia. The black feathered king of the Nahaks could not overcome Sungchul, but he was still a powerful and fearsome existence. It was assured that Marakia’s magic power exceeded the demon king’s.

‘If I use this guy, I might be able to take care of Hesthnius Max, the Demon King, without having to go through all that trouble of learning magic.’

Sungchul, who had let Max slip from his grasp, had been contemplating on many different ways to resolve his situation. A method was to bring a capable magician to deal the critical blow, but it hadn’t been possible due to two reasons. Firstly, there wasn’t a magician that would help him. Next, he wasn’t confident in being able to escort the magician safely to the Palace of the Demon

King even if he did manage to recruit someone.

There are thousands, tens of thousands of demons swarming about in the Demon world. As long as the demons weren't completely brain dead, if Sungchul were to bring a Mage such as Altugius Xero along, the demons would focus all of their attacks on whoever Sungchul had brought. Mental attacks, ambush, sensory alteration, large scale magic area bombardment, and mass attack with a great army. They would utilize each and every tactic and method available under the heavens.

Marakia was different. With Marakia's power, he should be able to preserve his life at the very least and be able to destroy the astral body of Max.

As Sungchul reached this conclusion, his heart grew light.

'This is the most assured method.'

Sungchul immediately stood before Marakia.

"Let's bargain."

Marakia, who had been tongue wrestling with Bertelgia, shut his beak and looked up towards Sungchul.

"A bargain?"

“Come with me to the Demon Realm to kill the Demon King.”

“The Demon King? Are you talking about Fuhrst, the Fire Eater?”

“That demon has been gone since ages ago. I am talking about Hesthnius Max.”

“Hesthnius Max? I’ve never heard of this demon. Ok. Is this demon strong?”

“He’s weaker than you.”

“Then why do you need to take me?”

Sungchul concisely described the circumstances between Max and himself. Marakia laughed out loud after hearing the story. When the laughter finally died, Marakia’s violet eyes grew bright as he spoke.

“Ok. You want to use my magic to take care of that vile demon. What do I gain from this?”

“If you cooperate with me to kill Max, I’ll grant you your life and freedom.”

“Life and freedom, eh?”

Marakia said in a ridiculing tone, and Sungchul's eyes grew a degree colder.

“Or I could just kill you right here.”

It was a quiet and calm voice, but it bore an unbearable weight to it. Marakia, who had been mocking the offer, suddenly felt the threat of death press down upon him. The man named Sungchul possessed enough power to kill him with ease. However, a question filled Marakia's mind.

“Just why do you wish to kill this demon king? Is it out of vengeance? Or maybe you wish to secure peace within the kingdom you rule over?”

At Marakia's question, Sungchul unhesitatingly made a short reply.

“It's to end the Calamity.”

Curiosity filled Marakia's eyes.

“I never knew that the one to defeat me would consider himself the Savior of the World.”

“Your answer?”

Sungchul's voice rang out once again, and Marakia nodded.

“I accept. I swear upon the name ‘King of Nahaks’ that I will help you, human.”

Marakia pulled out a single black feather on his body and held it to toward Sungchul.

“It’s a symbol of my promise. It is a royal gift from the great king of the Nahaks so receive it well.”

“I don’t need it.”

Sungchul raised Fal Garaz. When Marakia saw the hammer once again, he was reaffirmed on his need to keep his promise.

“Let’s take care of it right away.”

Sungchul left the tomb with a few dexterous movements. Bertelgia flapped her pages to follow after as Marakia wrapped his one remaining wing around his body and followed them with his two feet.

The Despair of the Abyss, who was now left alone within the tomb, looked toward the departing party and disappeared into the darkness.

The second underground floor was filled with countless Cave Elves. Their purpose was a mystery, but it was clear that they were

upset. Sungchul pulled out Cassandra, the demonic weapon, from his Soul Storage. Marakia saw this scene, stepped forward, and let out a clear sound. The long and crystal clear call that sounded like the cry of a Black Kite rang out throughout the dungeon causing all the Cave Elves residing within to respond simultaneously. It was out of pure terror.

“Ki....Kiiiiiii!”

The Cave Elves that simply fled from Cassandra’s noise began to scatter chaotically upon hearing Marakia’s call. It was not a rational fear. It was an instinctual terror that was residing deep in their blood. It was the call of the cold hearted avian that was their master and their predator.

“How’s that?”

Marakia who was watching the Cave Elves scatter like rats in panic asked in a relatively cheerful voice.

“Not bad.”

Sungchul moved forward as he put away Cassandra which had been made redundant. The party eventually made it through the dark and long corridors of the Underground Kingdom and reached the entrance. They waited for the pulley operated lift to arrive. However, an unwelcome guest awaited them. It was the Despair of the Abyss.

“ ... ”

The strange being stood in the center of the passageway as though it had something to say to Sungchul's party.

“Why does that thing exist within my kingdom?”

Marakia spoke in annoyance. Sungchul held Fal Garaz and walked toward the Despair of the Abyss.

“Begone, creature of oblivion.”

It was a troublesome enemy, but if it stood in his way, Sungchul wouldn't hesitate to fight. However, the Despair of the Abyss began to move past Sungchul unsteadily in a grotesque manner. It looked as though it was going to leave as before, but it stood in front of a person. It stood in front of Marakia.

“Hey, can't you do something about this monster?”

Marakia took a step back as he asked Sungchul. As Sungchul walked toward him with Fal Garaz in hand, Marakia saw it. He saw the beak of the oozing Despair of the Abyss slowly open.

“D...n't lea...”

It was speech. The Despair of the Abyss was speaking. Both Marakia and Sungchul immediately froze at this unexpected

situation. While everyone was stunned, the Despair of the Abyss with an avian head continued to speak, this time more coherently.

“D...Don’t...L...leave...”

In the next moment, Fal Garaz struck the creature’s head. It flew off into the distance crumbling into a formless shape before it regained its original appearance again.

“Just what is that thing?”

Marakia spoke in anger, but Sungchul didn’t respond. It was also the first time he had witnessed this situation.

‘A Despair of the Abyss spoke. I can’t believe it. It should have had its body, mind, and soul taken away as it became the Ancient God’s servant. This one managed to hold onto its consciousness?’

It was not something that could be figured out. It was not something that should be figured out. Sungchul thought these words in his mind as he got onto the lift. Marakia followed after.

“How long has it been since I came up to the surface?”

Marakia spoke in a relatively cheerful voice as though he had forgotten about the incident just moments ago. The mechanism of the lift activated, and the lift rose. When they climbed out of the hole, the sun in the sky began to blind them. A sharp scream rang out the moment they arrived at the entrance.

“Kyaaa!”

It was Marakia’s scream. He fell to his knees as he screamed in agony until it grew hoarse like the bellow of a cow.

Sungchul immediately stopped the pulley and inspected Marakia’s state.

“What’s wrong?”

He became covered in spots. Black spots blossomed all across Marakia’s body like a flower of death as Sungchul watched.

‘Isn’t... isn’t this the Curse of Extinction?’

The scene that he had never wished to see again reappeared before him in a flash.

“Kyaaaaaak!!”

Marakia continued to scream and thrash about in agony. Rotting discharge poured out like a fountain from the stump of his severed wing, and a disgusting stench began to spread.

Sungchul immediately lowered the lift. Once they reached the Underground Kingdom, Marakia’s condition stabilized. The spots that had spread on his body receded and the discharge from his

wound no longer flowed. However, Marakia did not speak as he remained hunched over with his arms and wing wrapped around himself as though the memory of the pain still haunted him.

Sungchul spoke to him after a considerable time had passed.

“Were you afflicted with the Curse of Extinction?”

He nodded at Sungchul’s question as his body lightly trembled.

“That’s right. The curse cast down by god afflicted my people without warning. It was the reason that the Nahaks that once roamed the skies was forced into the ground like moles.”

“You must be younger than you appear?”

Bertelgia offered a question toward Marakia in a soft voice. Marakia didn’t deny it.

“One year. I was cursed by a matter of a single year. My older brothers were fine, but my younger brothers and I were at the risk of death. However, my father the king wished to hand the crown to me, who had the black feathers. That is why the ritual was performed, and I continued to live but...”

Deep concern filled Marakia’s violet eyes.

“Why does the curse still remain?”

“...Because god is cruel.”

Sungchul responded. Marakia snorted in amusement, but the fact that his body was cursed remained.

“It appears as though I am fated to die anyways.

The spots that covered his body had faded, but it didn't disappear. Marakia laughed sadly as he looked toward the sky.

“Tens of thousands of years had passed, but my fate remains unchanged.”

Soon, fearsome anger began to burn in his eyes.

“Since this are the way things are, it wouldn't be bad to go out with a bang and just do whatever I want until I die.”

“ ... ”

“Burning the humans and crumbling their kingdoms. Who knows? Maybe, after I'm done, they'll remember me... and remember the Nahaks?”

Had Sungchul not been there next to him, Marakia might have done exactly as he had said. But Sungchul was, indeed, there.

“I won’t leave you to do this.”

He glared at Marakia and spoke clearly. Marakia laughed out loud.

“I am to die anyways. What does it matter to me if I die in one way or another?”

“I will stop the Calamity. Help me. If so, it will also free you from the curse on your body.”

“That’s nonsense. Mortals cannot overcome the Trial of God. Also, Calamities are not to be overcome. It is meant to be endured like the passing seasons.”

“There are those that have managed to overcome it.”

“What?”

Marakia didn’t look convinced. Sungchul was thinking of Bertelgia’s laughter as he replied.

“They are the humans that you have looked down on.”

Chapter 77 – The King’s Request (2)

Sungchul expounded on his reply a bit more.

“Specifically, by beings now referred to as the Seven Heroes.”

“What? Mere humans managed to overcome God’s Trial? Unbelievable.”

“You’re free to believe as you will, but let me just say one thing. I am stronger than all of the Seven Heroes combined, and haven’t you peered into me already? You should be more than aware of what kind of commitment I have made into this.”

“....”

Marakia didn’t admit nor deny anything. Instead, he simply waited for the aimless rage boiling inside of him to dissipate.

Time, as it had always done, calmed down the anger.

When the flames of rage inside of him pacified, Marakia spoke once again in a tired voice.

“How do you plan on overcoming the Calamity? You will not be enough to stop it on your own.”

“There are five Calamities in total. I should be able to overcome

three of them on my own at the very least. “

Sungchul spoke in a calm voice as he described the Calamities looming over the world currently. The First will arrive from the Demon World. According to the Scripture of Calamity, it is prophesied that the Demon King will lead a massive army of devils never before seen in history, burning everything as they make their way south.

The Second Calamity will come from the past. The return of the Seven Heroes that overcame a Calamity of the past. The Scripture of Calamity prophesied that they will return as the enemy of mortals and spread anguish, distrust, and death across the world.

The Third Calamity will come from suspicion. The survivors of the two Calamities that have swept through the continent and turned it into a wasteland will be filled with suspicion for one another and start a war which will only conclude at everyone's demise.

The fourth Calamity and beyond are not known. Some have spoken of the advent of the Lesser Gods or the stirring of the Dragonfolk as the Calamities to follow, but nothing had been confirmed as of yet. It was because everything after the third Calamity was blank when he saw the Scripture of Calamity last. The Scripture would update itself with new information when a Calamity progresses past a certain threshold.

“Half of the Calamities on your own? What great confidence.”

Marakia responded coldly. Sungchul continued to try to persuade him.

“It isn’t all that difficult for me. As long as the Demon King is taken care of, the rest of the Calamities will be resolved soon as well.”

However, Sungchul’s words were woefully lacking in trying to turn Marakia’s mind. Marakia snorted in laughter as he threw out a series of questions to shoot down Sungchul’s request.

“But what about the Fourth Calamity? And what if the Fifth Calamity turns out to be something that fundamentally cannot be resolved by your strength?”

“...”

Sungchul didn’t respond further. He knew that anything he would say will come off as being desperate. Marakia simply smirked and rose from his place.

“If you have nothing more to say, I’m going to go rest. I shall turn the Human Kingdoms to dust after I recover. This insult toward the Nahak will not be put to rest otherwise.”

Marakia spoke in a clear and bright voice as he leisurely walked deep into the dungeon. He would most likely keep his promise. He had already given up on his own life and had nothing more to lose.

Sungchul's eyes were filled with concern.

‘Things that can't be dealt with strength are such a hassle.’

In his eyes, there was only one option. He had to eliminate the suicidal Marakia by his own hands before Marakia left the dungeon. It was the worst possible outcome which nullified all the effort he had put in.

As Sungchul contemplated his soon-to-be failure, someone unexpectedly stepped up.

“Hey, you birdbrain! I have something to say!”

It was Bertelgia.

‘This kid?’

Sungchul had considered restraining Bertelgia, but vague hopes kept him taking a step back from the situation.

“Can't you hear me? Birdbrain! I said I have something to say!”

Bertelgia continued to scream, and soon Marakia stopped his steps and turned his head slightly.

“Book. Your words are too crude. Even if you have that human

guarding you by your side, it might be better to know your own place.”

Before his words were finished, a magic arrow accompanying a fearfully black feather shot toward Bertelgia. Bertelgia froze in this immediate change in circumstance, and could only watch as the magic arrow flew at her. As the arrow was about to be embedded into her body, a rough hand appeared to protect her.

Sungchul’s steely arm had protected her. The Magic Arrow managed to pierce his clothing, but when faced with his oppressive battle aura and his magic resistance, it dissipated without a trace.

“Keep talking.”

Sungchul whispered to her in a low voice. Bertelgia shook her body once toward Sungchul and continued in a clear voice without a trace of fear.

“You say that you were insulted as a Nahak?”

“So?”

Marakia turned around and nodded with his arms crossed.

“How can someone who places such importance on the pride of the species not look after his own kin?”

“What? My kin?”

“That’s right. Do you even know what kind of situation that the Nahaks like you are in right now?”

“What? What nonsense are you saying now?”

When Marakia let out a hollow laughter, Bertelgia broke free from Sungchul’s protective arm and spoke boldly.

“Then follow me, Proud King of Nahaks!”

She moved away from Sungchul and led the way down the dungeon.

‘This kid... she’s quite something.’

Sungchul was looking at Bertelgia’s back in a new light. He quickly followed after and escorted her down the path. Marakia didn’t look convinced, but he trotted behind as though Bertelgia’s words bothered him.

Bertelgia led Marakia to none other than the city of the Cave Elves. Looking at the dirty and damp city, Marakia frowned.

“Truly a lowly dwelling for a lowly race. I shall burn down all of these insects before I part from the Underground Kingdom.”

He said as such before letting loose a high-pitched bird cry. The clear and high-pitched cry of the Nahak rang out within the entire area causing all of the Cave Elves to tremble in terror. Some of the Cave Elves began to collapse foaming at the mouth while others started to shit themselves from where they stood.

Marakia amused himself by lifting some of the Cave Elves with psychokinesis and making them fall to their death. Bertelgia didn't say anything as she led him to their destination.

They stood before the poultry farm. The area reeked with some unknown foul stench intermingling with the smell of rotten flesh, and Marakia tilted his head in confusion as he stood before this massive tent.

“Are you saying there is something here?”

Something entered his line of sight. It was the white feathers decorating the tent. They were smaller and much duller than his, but they were similar to the feathers he knew very well about. Marakia extended his hand and examined one of the feathers.

‘This... a Nahak's feather...?!’

An ominous feeling crossed his mind. Marakia suddenly had a terrible thought, an unsettling premonition, as a chill crept up his spine when he looked towards the interior of the tent. Sounds of low-pitched bird cries, sounds of beaks repeatedly striking metal, and sounds of feathers ruffling could be heard. Marakia entered the tent as Sungchul and Bertelgia watched, and he finally saw it

with his own eyes.

He witnessed the fallen state of the ‘proud and noble’ people of Nahak who were now being raised as livestock by what he considered an insignificant and enslaved race.

Something holding him together inside had crumbled. A horrible shriek filled with a mixture of shock and anger reverberated within the tent for quite a while before the sound of everything within the tent being torn to shreds could be heard. Soon, a different Marakia came out of the tent.

Bertelgia let out a groan.

“The spots... grew darker.”

Was it due to the shock? Marakia’s spots grew much darker. Sungchul could smell the stench of death from his body.

“How did this happen?”, asked Marakia with a shaky voice.

“Your race fell after performing the ritual held for you, and those that remained were captured by the Cave Elves and raised as animals.”

“Domesticated animals... I can’t believe it.”

At that moment, a single young Nahak crawled out of the tent.

He was one of the rare blue Nahaks among the countless white feathered ones. Marakia believed it to be a sort of divine revelation. He spoke as he held the young Nahak.

“As long as I live, the Nahak will rise again and reclaim the skies.”

Marakia created an Orb of Knowledge. It was the physical manifestation of the language and the secret of the Nahaks. The orb was soon absorbed into the blue feathered chick.

The blue Nahak that had been making cries of an unintelligent animal shivered once and then looked at his surroundings with a different set of eyes. Different than before as though he had regained a bit of his intellect, but when the chick recovered its intelligence, black spots like those of poisonous mushrooms quickly spread across its body.

Sungchul muttered in a low voice.

“The moment he was freed from being a livestock and regained its intellect, the Calamity of Extinction returned without fail.”

The young Nahak whose entire body was covered in spots let out a shrill scream before it became limp in its king's grasp. Marakia stood dumbly as he looked at the young Nahak's corpse with eyes filled with disbelief.

“This is too cruel. Simply too...”

He couldn't manage to finish his words. He fell to his knees with the young Nahak's corpse in his grip.

In this moment of silence, Bertelgia spoke in a soft voice.

“They can only preserve their race as cattle...”

“...”

Sungchul moved toward the kneeling Marakia. Marakia who felt his presence looked up. His violet eyes held a single tear.

“Is this what a Calamity is?”

Marakia asked.

“This is also a Calamity.”

“Also?”

“That's right. This is the true nature of a Calamity which exists to crush all hopes and leave behind only a cruel reality.”

Sungchul responded.

“This is why I wish to destroy the Calamity.”

Fal Garaz appeared in Sungchul’s hand. When he swung Fal Garaz, the cloth covering the poultry farm blew away and tens of thousands of Nahaks within were revealed. When the cloth that was obstructing their vision disappeared, the young and curious beasts began to flee from the poultry farm and spread out everywhere. The white feathered Nahaks looked towards Marakia with curiosity. These Nahaks flapped their underdeveloped wings and drew closer towards him.

Marakia did not reject their touch. Instead, he rose from where he sat and extended his hand towards Sungchul.

“I will put my faith in you, human.”

“...”

Sungchul wordlessly extended his own hand and met Marakia’s. There was warmth no different than one between two humans in this grip.

“What is your name?”

Marakia finally asked.

“Sungchul Kim.”

“Sungchul Kim, eh? What a strange name. However, I don’t think I’ll be able to forget it.”

Marakia looked back toward the Nahak chicks once again before looking at Sungchul.

“I leave my people to you.”

Sungchul nodded.

Marakia closed his eyes. His one remaining wing covered his upper body, and soon he began to glow in a bright light. He was burning the last bit of life energy that remained in him to transform the vast power contained in his body into a single object. Marakia, who was covered in blinding light, disappeared and all that remained in his place was a large egg and a marble about the size of a fist emitting black and white energies.

“...”

Sungchul first lifted the large egg. It was a black egg. When he held it, a faint smile formed on his lips.

[Marakia’s Egg]

“I have heard a legend that some Nahaks can return to the form of an egg at the time of their death... like a phoenix.”

Bertelgia spoke beside him. Sungchul carefully placed the egg inside his Soul Storage, and lifted the orb that had been beside it.

[Soul Inheritance]

It was an object that held Marakia's will. Sungchul showed his respects towards Marakia by lowering his head then gripped the hand that held the Soul Inheritance tighter. When he did, the marble shattered and the power within it was absorbed into Sungchul. Messages flooded his sight in a bright light.

[Your strength is higher than the inheritance; therefore your strength did not increase.]

[Your dexterity is higher than the inheritance, therefore your dexterity did not increase.]

[Your vitality is higher than the inheritance; therefore your vitality did not increase.]

...

After all the messages that he had expected had flowed past, the words Sungchul was waiting for appeared.

[You will inherit the magic power within the inheritance.]

[You will inherit the intuition within the inheritance.]

...

When the inheritance ceremony was complete, Sungchul opened his status window. It was a status window which excluded bonus stats originating from external sources; a status screen showing only his base stats.

[Status]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Vitality 801 Magic Power 323

Intuition 334 Magic Resist 621

Resolve 502 Charisma 18

Luck 18

Magic Power and Intuition now exceeded 300. He had broken through what was commonly called the threshold of Superhuman in a single blow. Immediately a long list of things that had suddenly become possible came to mind, but Sungchul had something he had to do first.

“Look after these Nahaks. If I can’t hear the cry of Nahaks when I return to here, it will be the day that your entire race will meet

extinction.”

Sungchul made his ultimatum in front of the Cave Elf elders. The Cave Elves had already experienced his godlike strength and were simply bowing their heads in agreement. Sungchul visited the poultry farm once again before he left the Underground Kingdom. In front of the poultry farm lay the remains of Marakia left behind after his death. An unwelcome guest waited for him there.

It was the Despair of the Abyss, but its actions were strange. The oozy creature stood before Marakia’s remains and simply stared at it. Sungchul observed it for a while and saw no change. The creature simply stared at the ground where Marakia had disappeared like a statue. Sungchul and Bertelgia left the scene.

“Just what was that?”

When they were at the lift heading towards the surface, Bertelgia asked the obvious question in their minds.

The salty winds of the surface were blowing with force. Hair and clothes were fluttering wildly, and Bertelgia let out a short scream before hiding her body behind Sungchul.

A ray of light pierced through the darkness and fell across Sungchul’s eyes.

“Well.”

Sungchul brushed aside his fallen hair and spoke in a calm voice.

“It might be someone like me.”

He could hear the familiar cries of demons off in the distance.

Chapter 78 – Crusaders Of Salvation (1)

The serene area around the Tower of Recluse was teeming with an unprecedented amount of people. There were several airships anchored to the top of the tower while flying their various flags. There was only one possible reason for all of these representatives of prominent nations to have been gathered at the Tower of Recluse. It was due to a single piece of news.

[The contents of the Scripture of Calamity has been altered]

The Kings and the feudal lords of the many nations were gathered because of the letter sent out in the name of Porpyrius, the master of the Tower of Recluse. The visitors gathered at the holy site of the Scripture of Calamity, filled with concern and fear. They had witnessed it with their own eyes; The new contents detailing a brand new Calamity.

But soon, the tower became filled with murmurs.

“Hm?”

One man tilted his head from confusion. It was because the contents were no different than before. The contents were listed in order as they were in the past: the Calamity of the Demon King, the Calamity of the Seven Heroes, the Calamity of the War. There was nothing new.

Porpyrius' face froze. He immediately called over one of his servants that kept the grounds of the holy site and spoke in a low voice.

“What just happened?”

“I...it... disappeared.”

“What?”

“The Calamity of the Avian King suddenly disappeared.”

“What kind of nonsense are you uttering? How could that be possible?”

Despite his disbelief, the Scripture of Calamity clearly revealed in deafening silence that the words of his servant were correct. The atmosphere within the holy site was growing restless. No one spoke as such, but the gathered sovereigns looked towards Porpyrius with eyes of reproach.

Within these piercing gazes that were sharp and painful as arrows, Porpyrius swallowed deeply and attempted at an explanation.

“T-that is to say... The Calamity ended up disappearing due to an... unexplained circumstance.”

Porpyrius the Reclusive became the boy who cried wolf. The reputation that he had built for half of a century crumbled overnight. That day, he had to swallow more insults than he ever had in his life so he decided to use the strongest card in his hand.

“The Scripture of Calamity does not lie. Following this logic, we did not witness a lie, and there is no doubt that a power that we’re not aware of has intervened with what was foretold by the Scripture of Calamity.”

The one that was prostrated before Porpyrius lifted her head. Her red draconic eyes glowed underneath her deep hood.

“...Understood, incapable old man.”

Half dragonkin Kha’nes. Her name wasn’t widely known, but all those who were well-informed knew about it. This woman whose blood was mixed with that of the dragons, the most powerful race, was a being who existed outside the boundaries of the ordinary. This exceptional figure had just received a special command and had now set forth from the tower for the first time in several centuries.

However, Kha’nes’s personality was anything but diligent.

“Wouldn’t it be human of me to graciously accept all the delicious food out there since this is my first outing in a long time?”

This is how the most powerful Recluse, Kha'nes, began on her hunt for famous restaurants in search of the most delectable food.

Demonic Battlefront

The Suicide Unit was swept up in an uncomfortable silence. The reason was simple. The vice commander, Aaron Genghis, was in a foul mood. He had taken a hundred members of the unit on an airship, and he only managed to return with the single magician that followed him. There were no other survivors.

It was a frequent occurrence, but he confined himself in his private tent for a month now as though this instance came at a great shock to him. The veterans of the Suicide Unit who had seen this assumed that Aaron had realized his own shortcomings, but only a single man, number 34, knew the inside story.

‘He is right to be scared now that he abandoned Willie Gilford. He’s not a man known for his forgiving nature.’

This man, Sungchul, had returned to the Suicide Unit. There was no special reason behind it. The unit didn’t particularly restrict his activities and allowed him easier access to information, but these weren’t decisive enough reason for him to return. In truth, he returned without much thought and spent his days following a stable routine.

Recently, he had become acknowledged for his Alchemy and had

begun to make Alchemic items for his fellow soldiers. He left the unit early in the morning to gather materials and returned to synthesize the items in his cauldron later in the day.

He had made everything from antipyretics to decorative lightings and all sorts of miscellaneous sundries in between. And no one rebuked him for spending his time this way because he did everything on his own. He was sometimes commanded by the higher ups to create healing potions or other medicines, and this was met with favorable reception as they were known to be highly effective.

Sungchul who made the transformation from a bold patrolman to a talented Alchemist in one month's time, had a secret nobody knew about. He snuck out once a week to test his magical prowess on the Deep Sea Demon known as the gatekeeper of the entrance to the demon world.

He had mastered a new spell since the time he absorbed Marakia's power. Meteor; A powerful offensive spell that symbolized the might of Cosmomancy. He ruthlessly struck the back of the demon's head with this fearsome spell whose power had few equals.

“Guuuuh!!!”

Glare could only singe the creature's skin before, but the situation had changed now. The meteorite that fell from the sky possessed enough force to cause the Deep Sea Demon's body to go weak. He also gained another boon through his empowered magic power.

[Echo – 1]

Through supplementing his magic power, he was able to activate Echo, the skill of an Echo Mage. Although he was limited to a single Echo, the might of consecutive descent of the meteors was destructive.

Against an opponent he couldn't damage with his spells just a month ago, he was now able to injure it critically with the power of magic.

Even the basic magic, Glare, had become intensified by the multiplicative effects of the echo and grew powerful enough to pierce through the thick skin and burn the soft tissue underneath, spreading the sweet scent of freshly cooked meat through the air. Sungchul pounded the Deep Sea Demon to the inch of death before leaving.

“Hm. Not bad”

Bertelgia who had been floating in the air observing the fight gave her thoughts. However, Sungchul shook his head and downed a magic essence.

“It's still not enough. I'm no different than a court mage at this level.”

His capabilities already surpassed that of someone like Dolorence Winterer back at the Summoning Palace, but he still was lacking compared to any of the mages on the level of the Dean of Airfruit. Sungchul could guess that Altugius' magic power exceeded 450 at the minimum. He wanted to exceed that number and reach at least 500 before he headed to the Demon King. The reason was simple. Sungchul wanted to finish this in one go. If he made a half-assed attempt and failed, he might not get another chance. The Demon King was extremely crafty. Sungchul wanted to ambush the Demon King at a time he wouldn't expect with an attack he didn't think was possible. This was Sungchul's overall strategy.

‘Primordia Light. That is my only answer.’

This is why Sungchul chose the demon of the deep sea to mark his progress. Sungchul estimated that the endurance of the Deep Sea Demon was approximately the same as the Demon King, if not surpassing it altogether.

The Intuition required to learn Primordia Light was 500. Sungchul was currently half way at 340. He still need 160 more Intuition, but he was not in a hurry. He switched between combat and Alchemy to slowly train his own capabilities and would calmly gather information within his reach in the meantime.

And then one day, he heard a strange rumor within the barracks. It was a rumor that had been circulating for a while, but the information had gained fresh momentum as of late. It was the rumor that there was going to be a new offensive into the Demon Realm.

“I’ve heard they’ve organized the Crusaders of Salvation.”

Prisoner 0, Arkaard the Dwarf, spoke in a sigh.

“Crusaders of Salvation, eh?”

Sungchul’s expressions darkened. The origins of the Crusaders of Salvation went back to the days of the Seven Heroes. Various countries had ceased their wars and hostilities at the time and had joined forces in an effort to face the upcoming Calamity with their most elite of elite warriors. This was the birth of the Seven Heroes. They met and overcame the Calamity of their era.

The Crusaders of Salvation was a facsimile of the Seven Heroes. The countries would gather the elite and create punitive forces to oppose the Calamity as was done thousands of years ago in the past.

The problem was the quality of these elites. The great powers of the Other World did not send their best anymore. They sent subpar or completely tested rookies, and claimed that they had done due diligence. This is what was told to the residents of the Other World that were trembling in fear.

Sungchul who had been listening quietly suddenly asked Arkaard a question.

“Which number are they at now?”

Arkaard thought for a moment before relaying that this was the 13th Crusaders of Salvation.

“Number 13, eh?”

This meant that the previous 12 returned as failures. This begged the great question; how many people were killed or sacrificed in the name of salvation.

‘They’re still doing something this stupid. Those bastards.’

They were likely to continue this practice into perpetuity. Those in power were content enough to simply preserve the status quo. They only thought of the Crusaders of Salvation as a cheap sacrifice to this end.

Sungchul thought all these thoughts, but ultimately kept them to himself before leaving the area.

Next day, Aaron called up every member of the Suicide Unit. He looked emaciated as he had shut himself away for the past month, but those that had been with him for a while realized that he hadn’t changed much from the rockhead that he was before. Especially that overly confident smile on his face before he revealed a suicidal mission.

As expected, Aaron began his announcement in front of 300 soldiers.

“Lord Marquis Martin Breggas has permitted the 13th Crusaders of Salvation to pass the Frontlines into the demon world. Countless units competed for the honor of providing support to their cause, and rejoice! We, the 8th Suicide Unit, were chosen to become their support unit.”

It was like a thunderstorm in dry weather, but no one brought up any objections.

The Crusaders of Salvation entered the Suicide Unit’s encampment in the late afternoon. Sungchul who had been synthesizing in front of an Alchemic cauldron saw their large flag with a greatsword in the shape of a cross fluttering in the air and knew that what had to come had finally arrived.

‘They came quickly. It must mean that this matter was already agreed upon beforehand.’

Sungchul scanned over the formation of the Crusaders briefly. They were approximately 300 members, similar to the Suicide Unit, but the number of combat units were barely over 100. Experienced men were far and few between, and they were mostly comprised of untested youth. They looked to be mostly sons and daughters of prestigious families.

Complicated emotions ran through Sungchul’s mind as he watched Aaron head over to greet their leader.

“Oh, my. You’ve arrived? It must have been rough traveling for so long.”

Aaron was full of smiles as he continued bobbing his head up and down in an attempt to suck up to the leader of the Crusaders. However, the leader appeared to be a youth who was barely above the age for the Curse of Extinction.

“You’re Aaron Genghis? I’ve heard that you begged to escort us along our journey.”

The youth who was riding on a flawless white horse exuded elegance and haughtiness that suited it. He spoke his mind and didn’t care for the opinions of those around him.

“Truthfully, I wanted to enter the Demon Realm through the battlefield kept by the Elves rather than the Storm Battlefield managed by the Dwarves. I personally dislike dwarves.”

Aaron’s eyes crumpled visibly at the boy’s words, but nothing escaped his mouth. The boy looked over the bleak encampment of the Suicide Unit and spoke as if he was spitting.

“Goodness, what an inelegant unit in an inelegant place. Does such a unit really deserve the honor of escorting the Crusaders of Salvation?”

This was the moment that signified the end of the peace and the

coming of the storm for the Suicide Unit.

Chapter 79 – Crusaders Of Salvation (2)

The Crusaders of Salvation set up their camp at the dead centre of the Suicide Unit's encampment. The retinue was responsible for their manual labor.

From this place, one could hear the sounds of horseshoes being fitted and the cries of their laborers. The Crusaders of Salvation, who had little else to do, gathered in small groups for idle chat or wandered around their surroundings. Some of the Crusaders visited the tent where Sungchul performed his Alchemy. Three men and two women, all so young it looked as though they had narrowly avoided the Curse of Extinction. One of them discovered the Alchemic cauldron and called her comrades into the tent.

“Hey look over here! There's an Alchemist here!”

“What? There's an Alchemist in a place like this? Weird.”

“Should we go check out what he's making?”

Sungchul was standing right before them, but they continued without giving him any importance. It was because of the prisoner number attached to his ragged coat. Sungchul peeked over at the unwelcome guests and continued what he was doing. He was making a Level 4 alchemic item called the Jug of Purification. It was a jar created from the clay found in the Demon Realm mixed with the Kaolin clay found further south.

The Jar was able to purify water into drinkable water, no matter

how dirty or impure it was. It was an invaluable item within the Demon Realm where fresh water was difficult to find. Not only that, its Alchemic level was four. In the Other World where Alchemy was looked down upon, it was a significant level of difficulty.

Whoosh. Whoosh. Whoosh.

Sungchul continued to grow the flames beneath the Alchemic cauldron by stepping on the bellows with no particular expression on his face. The jar inside the lidded cauldron was beginning to take a solid form as it was baked. When the jar was properly baked, Sungchul opened the lid. The steam that had been circulating within flew out with fearsome vigor. Sungchul placed a spoon inside the cauldron with the jar and began to stir.

The act of stirring was more for the purpose of allowing the mana to flow into the Alchemic item, which granted the item a life of its own, rather than actually mixing the ingredients. He wasn't aware of it at first, but it was knowledge he acquired through continued practice. The spoon appeared to touch the jar, but it didn't. The spoon simply passed through the jar and stirred the bottom of the cauldron as though the spoon and the jar were on separate planes of existence. It was a small miracle that occurred within an Alchemic cauldron, but it didn't seem to appeal to the onlookers.

“Boring.”

“I thought it might be interesting, but it's some useless jar?”

“I thought he was making a bomb or something.”

“It looks cheap.”

Each onlooker made their complaints before leaving the tent.

“...”

The pride of Sungchul, for whom everything had been going well recently, crumbled. It affected the results poorly.

[Synthesis Failed!]

With a poof, the jar inside the cauldron shattered into countless pieces before turning into black dust.

“Those fucking bitches...!!”

Sungchul’s face became twisted as he headed towards the members of the Crusaders of Salvation.

“Woah~ calm down.”

Bertelgia shook her body within his pocket and spoke to him

softly.

“Failure is the mother of success! A true Alchemist must be able to create the Philosopher’s Stone even in the middle of a busy market place.”

“...”

Sungchul clenched his teeth as he left the tent. Noncommissioned soldiers nearby saw Sungchul and threw out their greetings.

“Hey! Alchemist! Is it going well?”

“So-so.”

Sungchul went towards the back of the tent. There was a separate brazier and preparatory table installed here. It was a private kitchen which Sungchul sometimes used to cook. He glimpsed around his surroundings before he pulled out the ingredients from his Soul Storage. It was the Mandragora kimchi and blood drained from the corpse of the Man-faced Beast in the Demon Realm.

The meat of the Man-faced Beast was tough like leather, and when one bit down on it, the abscess within it exploded with unpleasant flavor which made it impossible to eat. However, fresh blood from a recently killed Man-faced Beast made for great soup.

He pulled out the ingredients onto a simple counter to the side, then headed over to the food storage with three low-grade healing potions.

“What? Another trade?”

The storage manager, prisoner number 132, peeked over at Sungchul’s healing potions then handed over a portion of the rations. Dried sausages, ham, and an unknown bird’s carcass were traded for three healing potions. Sungchul took the exchanged materials to his own barracks to begin cooking.

Even though it was called cooking, there wasn’t much to it.

The mountain bird’s bones were boiled to make meat stock and left to simmer as the alchemic cauldron’s lid was set upside down and used as a pan to cook the Man Faced Beast’s blood.

Once the blood was cooked to a certain extent the Mandragora Kimchi, Sausages and Ham he received earlier, and the Mountain Bird stock was added in and brought to a boil. After it had boiled enough, he added in the spices and adjusted the flavor. This was the Demon Frontline version of sausage stew.

Unfortunately, Sungchul’s cooking wasn’t popular within the barracks. It was because the food was seasoned heavily with spices that the Other Worlders weren’t familiar with. Their opinions might have changed if they had given it a chance, but the soldiers of the Suicide Unit weren’t feeling very adventurous when it came to their meals.

Sungchul didn't judge them for it. His food was made for his sake anyways. However, unfamiliar onlookers arrived as he was putting the finishing touches. He briefly wondered who they were, but quickly realized it was the same five members that watched him do Alchemy.

“Huh? What's this, Alchemy?”

A freckled girl with blonde hair looked over at the bubbling sausage stew and popped her question.

‘To call it Alchemy...’

The fact that the girl called his dignified cooking Alchemy meant that she didn't see Sungchul's food as food.

“Whatever it is, it reeks. Is he making something dangerous?”

A blonde youth oozing with pomp clenched his nose and made a disgusted expression. The fellows next to him had things to say as well.

“It looks like some kind of food? Look. There's some sausage and ham floating on the red liquid.”

“Uwek.”

The conversation between the five fell right into Sungchul's ears. Sungchul felt humiliation on a level he had never experienced before.

‘Making such judgement of a High-Class Chef's dish. Such arrogance from mere petty nobles.’

Judging strictly by ability, Sungchul was a level above the average royal chefs. Chef itself was a rare class, and not just anybody could become a high-class chef which was a rarity among the chefs.

Sungchul had actually spent considerable effort to become a high-class chef, and he had great pride in his own recipes; and those five had dared to mock Sungchul's food.

Bertelgia could feel something big rumbling from Sungchul's psyche and began to shake strongly as she whispered softly.

“Hold it. Woaaah~ Relax.”

However, Bertelgia's words didn't reach Sungchul's ears. Sungchul turned to face the group of five. An incredibly heavy aura exuded from his person, and the five leaped up from the sudden change in atmosphere. Sungchul slowly opened his mouth.

“Why not give it a try?”

He held a ladle with the Man-faced Beast stew with pieces of ham

and sausage within towards the group.

“Go ahead and eat some.”

The faces of the five froze at Sungchul’s sudden suggestion. Sungchul continued to insist.

“Hey. Why don’t you have a bite before you make a judgement? See if it tastes good or not.”

Despite Sungchul’s repeated insistence, the group of five remained distant.

“Let’s go.”

The blonde youth spoke coldly before turning to leave. The other four followed suit without question. Callous voices could be heard from their backs.

“How could anyone eat something like that?”

“Not even dogs would eat that slop.”

Sungchul was unperturbed. He only smirked to himself.

“How dare they reject the food of a high-class chef. They lost an opportunity of their lifetime.”

Sungchul returned to his place and swallowed the stew in his ladle in a single gulp. The clotted blood exploded with savory flavors and melted on his tongue like soft tofu as the sausage and ham that had a chewy texture filled his stomach. The Mandragora kimchi complemented the soup nicely with a deep vinegar flavor. It was truly a feast of flavors in his mouth. Sungchul wore a satisfied expression on his face.

‘I give it an 87.’

However, his class didn’t rate it so highly.

[This recipe is... 34 points.]

‘I don’t know who is managing this class, but I really want to see his face just once.’

Sungchul thought to himself as he pulled out a hard liquor from his supplies and downed it. The bursting flavor in his mouth mixed with the strong drink as it moved into his stomach. It was heavenly.

‘They rejected something this good. They’re truly pitiful.’

Sungchul who was dining in this way felt someone’s gaze. He turned around to see if the five from before had returned, but it

was someone unexpected.

‘This guy is...’

Curiosity rose in his eyes. His visitors were a blonde male who was the head of the Crusaders of Salvation, and a blonde woman who looked just like him.

“I thought I smelled something funky. It looks like it was the cooking of a Summoned.”

The youth approached Sungchul then looked over at the boiling sausage stew in the cauldron lid with a sharp gaze. Sungchul didn’t reply and continued to look up at him.

The youth looked young and delicate, but his eyes were bold and prudent.

‘He looks like he’s got some spunk. I don’t know how it’ll be in reality though.’

Sungchul shifted his gaze towards the girl who was standing behind the youth protectively. She had a similarly pale blonde hair and piercing blue eyes, and she was already looking at Sungchul. The moment their eyes met, Sungchul was reminded of a freshly honed blade of a knife.

‘The siblings are quite something despite their age.’

Sungchul finished judging the unwelcome guests as the youth who was observing his food began to speak.

“Hmm. This red soup, and this provocative smell. It feels similar to the food they serve at the Order of the Iron Blood Knights.”

“... ”

“The food didn’t taste good, and I forced myself to eat it, but it was quite spicy and striking. I felt like I was looking at the Order’s heart. All flash with nothing to show for it.”

“What do you want to say?”

Sungchul downed another shot of alcohol as he retorted. Even dogs should be left alone during their meals. He wasn’t feeling hospitable as these unwelcome guests were buzzing around him during his meal.

The corner of the youth’s lip rose as the hand of the girl behind him reached for the hilt of her blade. A thick aura of hostility flew out from her. The youth waved his hand towards her.

“Sophia. Stop. I am the one in the wrong here.”

He slightly bent his neck towards Sungchul so as to express his apology for his disrespectful behavior.

“I apologize, unknown soldier. I smelled the scent of such foreign food, and I unknowingly overstepped my bounds.”

To apologize to a no-name soldier that even Aaron Genghis, the head of the Suicide Unit, treated like an insect. It was an unusual occurrence. This guy was growing on Sungchul. Sungchul took a ladle and offered a portion of the soup towards the youth.

“Don’t just apologize with words, try some.”

At Sungchul’s sudden action, the youth briefly froze.

“Brother.”

The woman behind him had a worried expression and approached him. She glared towards Sungchul with a frosty gaze and shouted.

“You. Summoned! Who do you think he is that you can shove your slop of garbage towards him?”

Her blade was already pulled halfway. Sungchul looked at her shining sword and pulled back the ladle with a smile.

“Don’t eat it, if you don’t want to.”

The woman’s face grew scornful after hearing his words.

“This bastard...”

The youth restrained the girl once again.

“Sophia. Restrain yourself. How long do you intend to remain hysterical?”

Unlike the fuming girl, the youth sat next to Sungchul with a relaxed expression on his face.

“Could I give it a taste?”

Sungchul made a faint smile and handed over a small bowl filled with the stew. The youth made a mysterious expression on his face as he looked at the contents.

“It won’t taste as good if it goes cold.”

Sungchul said.

“Brother. You can’t eat this.”

The girl objected, but the youth smirked and swallowed Sungchul’s dish in a single gulp. However, his attitude was like that of someone forcing himself to try and eat something that wasn’t food. It looked as if he was doing something reckless like a youth.

The youth who had the stew in his mouth began to chew a few times before his face turned to stone. The girl who was watching the scene became pale.

“Brother!”

At that moment, the youth let out a soft exclamation.

“Huh...?!”

Sungchul crossed his arms and made a smug expression on his face as he observed the change.

‘I made it. There is no way it’ll taste bad.’

The youth who had a mysterious expression on his face looked behind him with a happy expression and spoke in a cheerful voice.

“It’s good!”

The mood changed completely.

Chapter 80 – Crusaders Of Salvation (3)

“It’s quite delicious, Sophia. You must give it a try. The black mass melts softly in your mouth, and there really is no better dish!”

“I don’t believe you.”

“It’s the truth. It’s really good.”

Sungchul silently listened to the bickering of the siblings while taking in his drinks. He could feel his injured pride of a high-class chef slowly being healed. After the brief intermission, the youth formally introduced himself.

“This had been thoroughly enjoyable, Mr. Number 34. It wasn’t my original purpose in coming here, but I was treated to a gourmet meal. I am Elijah Breggas.”

Curiosity filled Sungchul’s eyes.

‘Breggas?’

A particular man’s face appeared in his mind. The Sixth Champion of the Continent, Lord Marquis Breggas. This youth shared the first name of the man in charge of the Demonic Battlefront, but the chances of him being the man’s son were low. There was just no way that Martin, who knew the value of survival better than anyone, would send out his flesh and blood as a

Crusader of Salvation whose survival rate was lower than 10%.

Elijah and Sophia Breggas took their leave during Sungchul's silence. After finishing up his meal, Sungchul headed toward the medical tent where the veteran soldiers were gathered.

It wasn't hard to distinguish the medical tent. All of the tents looked similar to each other, but the medical tent was adorned with the numbers of the fallen soldiers. Sungchul noticed the number 700 among the countless numbers attached to the large tent as he entered and figured that the Suicide Unit had been much larger in scale before.

Once he entered the tent, he could see that the veteran soldiers were having fun gambling. Playing dice was one of the favorite pastimes of bored soldiers.

“Haha! Sorry, but my senses are off the charts today!”

Sungchul stood behind an enthusiastic Dwarf and watched him toss his die. It was a losing throw.

“Shit!”

The most veteran among the Suicide Unit, Number 0 Arkaard, pushed his share of the rations towards his opponent, then looked up towards Sungchul.

“Is something wrong, Alchemist?”

“I have a couple of questions.”

Arkaard was not only the most senior within the unit, but was also quite friendly which earned him a lot of friends with the logistics team, his superiors, and most importantly the Dwarven engineering corp. Thanks to him, it was possible to hear fresh news about the outside world. However, nothing in this world was free. Sungchul handed Arkaard a freshly brewed hangover cure.

“Exactly what I wanted.”

Arkaard looked extremely happy as he passed the baton over to Sungchul.

“Now, what are you curious about?”

Sungchul avoided asking anything too sensitive or a subject of secrecy. Although it didn't look all that important on the surface, being able to earn the trust, build and maintain a relationship with an informant was an important conversational skill.

Sungchul asked about any updates or development on the frontlines of the Demon world as well as a brief summary on the new arrivals; the Crusaders of Salvation. Arkaard gulped down the hangover cure in a single breath and spoke.

“Mm. There haven't been many changes overall regarding the frontline. The winter has come, but the devil army is still stationed

within the territory of the Iron Blood Knights, and the Order of the Iron Blood Knights are moving in full force to repel them. It looks like hard battles are ahead. Well, none of that matters to us anyways.”

Arkaard followed up with information regarding the Crusaders of Salvation.

“I don’t know what Aaron Genghis is planning, but don’t worry too hard about it. Do you know who the leader of the Crusaders is this time? It’s Elijah freaking Breggas. They tell me that he’s the eldest son of Lord Marquis Martin Breggas who could be considered as the head commander of the entire Demonic Battlefront!”

Sungchul immediately doubted his own hearing. It would have been shocking enough for the man to have sent his close relative, but his own eldest son?

‘Martin Breggas isn’t known to have such a strong sense of duty...’

Sungchul had fought several battles with Martin Breggas. From what feels like a distant past when the awakening of the Dark Dragon Groteus drove the world to the brink of destruction to the punitive expedition to the Demon King 8 years ago, he had fought alongside the man through battles filled with blood and death, shoulder to shoulder. Sungchul recalled that the man was rather selfish and self-centered during those hard fought battles. The only reason that he had taken over as Lord Marquis of the Demonic Battlefront was to be unrestrained and, in turn, be allowed to boast

about his contributions. Would this kind of man send his eldest son and daughter to the Crusaders of Salvation, an act which was nothing more than a glorified execution? That would be irrational. There had to be another side to this story.

“What are you thinking so hard about?”

Arkaard prodded for conversation as he was in a great mood. The dwarf usually had a friendly demeanor, but he was on another level today.

“Did something good happen?”

When Sungchul asked, Arkaard lifted his drink up and let out a lively chuckle.

“Indeed indeed! I might be able to leave this damned Suicide Unit thanks to Martin Breggas’ son!”

A faint smile rose on Sungchul’s lips at the news.

“Ho. This is the last one?”

Arkaard nodded vigorously. “I’ve been through hell and back 9 times already. I’ve even been all the way into the central regions of the demon world as well. Time has come for me to return to the home of my heart, the Storm Battlefield, and defend that black rocky mountain.”

It was easy to enter the Suicide Unit, but it wasn't so easy to graduate from it. The chances of survival might increase with a brilliant commander of good character, but with someone rash and incompetent like Aaron Genghis, it was next to impossible. To be able to survive 9 missions through those unfavorable conditions meant that Arkaard was no ordinary fighter.

“Even if he's a rockhead, he shouldn't be able to pull any of his stunts now that the Marquis' son is here.”

“His usual stunts, eh...”

When Sungchul's trailed off his words, Arkaard made a mischievous smile as he checked his surroundings before leaning in to whisper.

“What do you think I mean? Leading his subordinates to their deaths is what I mean. That guy might be nicknamed rockhead, but he's more like a fox.”

Sungchul knew that Aaron was a cunning and underhanded fellow. He purposely set forth on impossible missions to sacrifice his men to not only make the battles seem more difficult than they truly were to artificially boost his military merits, but also to monopolize all the credit. He might appear like an incompetent rockhead of a commander to his subordinates, but to his superiors, he was a sly dog they can't get rid of.

“...I might be the first to graduate from the Suicide Unit under

that rockhead. Truthfully, this place isn't so bad if it wasn't so dangerous."

Arkaard spoke for quite a while about the beauty of his homeland and the strength of the Dwarven people. After the lengthy story came to an end, his eyes lit up as though he finally recalled something and handed something over to Sungchul.

"Look at me. I completely forgot that Deckard asked me to deliver a letter to you. Read it carefully. The letter hasn't been censored."

Sungchul acknowledged him with a nod before reading the letter. The contents of the letter weren't anything new. It was mostly a letter about how he was still in the infirmary and was thinking of his family, but he also packed the end of the letter with a full list of all quests he discovered within the Demonic Battlefront that was Magic Power related. It might be a Deckard-esque show of gratitude. Unfortunately, Sungchul no longer had any use for these quests.

[Your Magic Power is too high.]

The quest that he tried as an experiment told the full story. Sungchul was no longer considered an average mage, and could no longer raise his stats through normal quests. Only those made by the likes of the Seven Heroes or Altugius, at the very least, would supplement his growth.

“ ... ”

Sungchul gave up on Deckard's list of quests without hesitation.

‘I should work more on the collection journal before the winter passes.’

He had already completed all the quests that were worth doing. All that was left were the quests related to the Creationist that he had been putting off. According to Bertelgia, these were necessary experiences to Sungchul as a Creationist. The difference between ‘being able to do’ and ‘having tried it’ for an alchemist was like the difference between heaven and earth. So to improve as an alchemist, he had no choice but to make anything and everything, and a lot of it.

“All the Alchemic items you've created so far have been recorded by me. You've only completed up to 40% of the illustrated works recorded within me, and although you've surpassed the average Alchemist of this world by leaps and bounds, you're still lacking in my eyes. You could only consider yourself an Alchemist of true worth when you've completed up to 50% of my pages!”

Sungchul let Bertelgia's words pass through one ear and out the other, but he did keep one thing in mind. Making progress on the collection journal slowly raised his stats. To Sungchul who couldn't be satisfied with normal quests, this was an important opportunity.

Sungchul started by reattempting the Jug of Essence that he

failed before and succeeded. He placed the Jug of Essence in the corner of the tent and tested it with some seawater he got from nearby. The bright gray color of the jug grew a bit dull, and the seawater within became purified.

Sungchul tasted a cup of the water within the jug.

“It’s not very tasty, but it really is drinkable.”

When he said so, Bertelgia immediately retorted angrily.

“How naive! If you can make an S grade Jug of Essence, you wouldn’t be able to find a better tasting water anywhere in the world!”

“I noticed that an S grade item is extremely difficult to make.”

“To begin with, the ingredients have to be good. The quality of the ingredients is directly linked to the grade of the Alchemic Item, but it’s hard to get good quality ingredients.”

“I always feel this way, but Cooking and Alchemy seems to be very similar.”

Cooking was the same. It was possible to make something tasty with poor ingredients, but there was a limit. Top grade recipes were only possible with top grade ingredients. High-grade chef and Alchemist. They looked like two unrelated classes, but Sungchul began to realize that the two classes were two sides of the same

coin.

After a bit of rest, Sungchul rose from his seat and headed toward the Alchemic cauldron.

“Bertelgia. Next recipe.”

“My, you’re planning on making two things today? Aren’t you overworking yourself?”

“Why not just get it over with while I’m still at it. I have enough Magic Power.”

Thanks to the Magic Power he had obtained from the Underground Kingdom, Sungchul could now hold much more mana within his body than before which in turn allowed him to synthesize more Alchemic items. Not only that, but he could also see higher grade Alchemic item recipes thanks to the Intuition he earned at the same time. The increase in Magic Power and Intuition supplemented Alchemy and the rise in Alchemy was, in turn, supplementing Magic Power and Intuition. Sungchul didn’t rush himself, but he also did not relax.

Although Sungchul had hit something of a plateau in his growth, he was with the mindset that he was going to do whatever he could every single day.

“Well, I won’t stop you if you insist. Bertelgia’s Illustrated Alchemic Collection Journal! The next item is...”

As Bertelgia was about to turn the page a sharp sound of a trumpet rang from the outside. It was the call for the Suicide Unit to sortie.

“It looks like we’ll have to put off the next synthesis for another time.”

Sungchul stuffed Bertelgia into his coat pocket and left the tent.

“Enter.”

The one to sortie the members of the Suicide Unit was none other than Aaron Genghis. Sungchul discovered a familiar face next to him. It was the leader of the 13th Crusaders of Salvation and the eldest son of the Sixth Continental Champion, Elijah Breggas, standing behind Aaron with no particular expression on his face while his younger sister, Sophia Breggas, stood beside him protectively. Aaron Genghis spoke as the Suicide Unit watched on.

“We the members of the Suicide Unit have been given the duty and honor to escort the Crusaders of Salvation, heroes hailing from every corner of the continent, to the dangerous gateway to the Demon Realm in 3 days time. This mission has been ordered by the Lord Marquis Martin Breggas himself, and thus it will count as 3 successful missions for those members who wish to participate...”

Arkaard who had been listening so far spat on the ground and began to complain.

“What? What the hell is this about? It’s one mission so it should count as one mission!”

On the other hand, his closest companion, the Elven archer Faagan, had a delighted expression.

“It looks as though we’ll be leaving this place hand in hand, Mr. Dwarf.”

“This is bullshit!”

Arkaard was full of complaints, but his expression betrayed his true thoughts. Faagan played along as well.

“Anyways, that kid Deckard. He’ll miss this golden opportunity.”

A trip to the Demonic Realm’s entrance was treacherous, but it wasn’t too difficult. Not only that, the winter season meant reduced activity from the demons. The veterans of the Suicide Unit treated this mission as a rare gift bestowed by the gods.

“ ... ”

Elijah Breggas looked upon those celebrating soldiers with an indifferent gaze. Aaron continued to shout at the top of his lungs, but no one was listening to what he had to say.

“Brother. Is this really ok?”

In the middle of all the excitement, Sophia leaned in to whisper to her brother.

“If we arrive at the Demonic Realm and fail, he will just get what he wants.”

Deep concern drew over her face. A sigh escaped from Elijah’s mouth.

“It can’t be helped, Sophia.”

His eyes were looking beyond the razor sharp mountain ridge, toward the northern skies in the distance that was just beginning to take on a red tint. The Demonic Realm. The land of the Devils. It was the forbidden lands that were synonymous with death to humans, but it represented a unique opportunity in Elijah’s eyes. His delicate hands caressed an ominous book dyed in the color of blood beneath his cloak.

“There should be another way. A way that doesn’t involve this method.”

Sophia still seemed skeptical, but Elijah’s resolution was unshakable.

“Our opponent is one called a Continental Champion. We have no other choice in the matter, Sophia.”

He spoke in a quiet, but firm voice.

“Only the devil’s quest can bring us salvation.”

Chapter 81 – Invasion Of The Demonic Realm (1)

On the day of the expedition, the weather was fair and clear like no other. 300 members of the Suicide Unit and 300 units of the Crusaders of Salvation. Under the bright morning sun, the army of 600 men began their march towards the demon world along a previously planned route. It would take 3 days by foot to arrive at the entrance of the Demon Realm.

The first terrain they ran into were the rugged mountain regions under the jurisdiction of the Storm Battlefront. The region was littered with ideal ambush locations, so Aaron took extra precaution with scouting. Even Sungchul had been sent to scout several times, but no ambush lay in wait as Aaron had feared. Even if it did, they were crushed by Sungchul's hands and were left unreported.

By the end of the cautious march, the sun that had been sitting on the rugged mountains was now perched on the western mountains. It wasn't wise to move within the darkness that the Devils favored, so Aaron ordered the group to make camp.

“ ... ”

Sungchul who finished making his tent before anyone else left camp to roam the areas close to mountain regions. The snow-covered field, now dyed in a red tint from the setting sun, appeared empty, but Sungchul's sharp observation detected a single blade peeking above the crimson snow. He brushed off the snow to grasp the grass hidden within. An information screen appeared before

him as he took a whiff.

[Blind Man's Grass]

Level: 1

Grade: A

Attribute: Wood

Effect: None

Note: It is commonly seen along the roadside, but due to its stabilizing nature, it acts as a neutralizing agent to otherwise reactive ingredients.

Blind Man's Grass was plentiful around the Other World. It was a common ingredient that Sungchul had collected endlessly, but if there was one thing that made the Blind Man's grass in this region unique, it was its grade. It had reached A grade.

“Hoh.”

“How is it? It's as I said, right? Blind Man's grass can grow anywhere, but its potency rises proportionately to the harshness of the environment it is found in!”

Sungchul tossed the Blind Man's Grass into the gunny sack on his back and continued to seek out more. He discovered another clump of Blind Man's Grass buried in the snow. Sungchul pulled it out forcefully.

“This...”

Sungchul’s eyes lit up in curiosity. The clump in his hand had the top grade of S. Bertelgia flapped her pages as she spoke.

“We should be able to make the most powerful buffers! Top grade buffer doesn’t only neutralize Alchemic ingredients, but it also affects the item’s grade!”

“Not bad.”

He had been making more than one type of item per day, but none of them could be considered higher than B grade. Whether it was from his pride as a High-class Chef, but he felt determined to make an A grade item, and the expedition into the Demon Realm provided the perfect opportunity to collect high-quality alchemic materials. He had left to hunt for ingredients every day, but he was always short on time, and it wasn’t possible to leisurely seek out the top grade ingredients.

Now that he was stuffing his sack full of top grade Blind Man’s Grass, he discovered something moving beneath the snow out of the corner of his eyes. It was a deer of a heavy built with massive horns. It appeared to be a normal deer, but because it lived near the Demonic Realm, its strength could be compared to mystical creatures with resilient life force. Its meat was on another level.

Sungchul felt some drool pooling in his mouth at the sight of the deer, but he noticed something else. There was an arrow stuck onto the deer. Blood dripped from the wound dying the fluffy

white snow red.

‘Is he being hunted by someone?’

A hunter appeared from beyond the snow covered mountain. The identity of the hunter turned out to be a slim woman wearing fancy equipment. Sungchul recognized her face.

“That kid. Isn’t she the sister of Elijah Breggas? What was her name?”

Sungchul turned to ask Bertelgia. She had a much better memory than him, and she spoke in a cheerful voice as she loved to boast about it.

“Sophia!”

“Ah, yes. It was Sophia.”

Sungchul had trouble with the names of women. He just didn’t care about them. Sophia wielded a bow carved from Faerie wood used by the Elves and was chasing her prey at high speed. She pulled the string of her bow. The arrow fired from the taut bow flew out in a line and pierced the deer’s neck. It was a flawless and honed performance.

“Hoo...”

Sophia saw the deer fall, put her bow around her back, and approached it.

‘I should be able to serve a decent meal to brother with this.’

A faint expression of joy appeared on her usually indifferent face, but there was another guest standing near the deer already. It was none other than Sungchul. Sophia’s indifference face filled with animosity.

“Hey, you. What are you doing here?”

Sungchul revealed his gunny sack filled with Blind Man’s Grass and spoke in a neutral voice.

“Gathering ingredients.”

“Ah.”

Her lips parted slightly as she hefted the massive deer onto her shoulder. The massive deer that would weigh near 1 ton was lying on Sophia’s slim figure. It was an admirable amount of strength, but she would not be able to ignore the uneven distribution of weight due to its size. Not long after she hefted the creature onto her shoulder, Sophia lost her balance and was forced to put the deer back down.

‘Should I use the Soul Storage? No, something this big won’t fit. And most likely it will completely dry out.’

Sophia was breathing heavily as she looked down on the carcass, then she decided to cut off a portion of the beast. Suddenly, she heard a clear voice beside her.

“Excuse me, but may I have a share of the beast?”

It was Sungchul. Sophia peered over at the member of the Suicide Unit and his ragged clothing out of the corner of her eyes and scoffed at him.

“No need to be so roundabout in saying that you want to die.”

She didn't like him from the beginning. Even Aaron Genghis, the leader of the Suicide Unit, wagged his tail like a dumb puppy in front of the siblings, it was pure disrespect for a mere criminal to stand with a straight neck before her.

There were only two types of people who would act this way before members of the Breggas family, the most powerful family in the front lines of the Demon World; those who did not know, and those who did not know fear. It didn't matter which it was to her. Neither was acceptable in her eyes.

“If you want, I'm willing to give you a hand in butchering the beast.”

Sungchul asserted once again. She didn't like any part of him, but his request was reasonable enough to let him past her guard. It

was because Sophia was skilled in hunting, but she was clueless on the work afterwards. She usually left her servants to handle the meat, but because of where she was headed, she didn't bring any with her. Considering all this, Sungchul's request seemed reasonable.

"I won't hand over any of the good portions. Head, feet, and maybe the hindquarters?"

She spoke with her frosty gaze trained on Sungchul. Sungchul didn't mind at all.

"I don't need all that. Just his internal organs are fine."

Sophia scoffed again.

'Figures.'

Unless it was the liver of geese, intestines and organs were food only commoners ate. To ask for portions that were given to hunting dogs, it was only natural for her to laugh at his request.

"Fine. If that's what you want, then do as you wish, but in turn, butcher the meat ahead of time. I'll send someone for it."

"I'll just take it to you personally. Not like it's heavy."

"Ah, is that ok? I won't stop you if you want to bring it over. If

you can, that is. However, if I find that any more than the portions discussed are missing, then there will be harsh punishment.”

After she relayed her threat, Sophia left the snowy mountain quickly.

“Truly an annoying woman.” said Bertelgia as she flew out of his pocket to complain.

“ ... ”

Sungchul didn't care about the attitudes of common people as always. All of his attention was focused on the carcass that was rapidly cooling in the snow.

“This guy's quite rare around these parts. I got lucky.”

As the region was infertile, vegetation was rare which also meant game animals were also rare. It would be hard to find a deer of this size after a week of hunting. Sungchul pulled out the treasured ‘Sword of the State’ from the Human Empire and sliced through the deer's belly. Blood and viscera contained within poured out. He pulled out a bright red colored organ to examine the texture in the light.

“Truly an impressive liver. Top quality.”

“Uuu.... you eat liver? I can't eat that stuff. Maybe if it was the lean meat.”

Bertelgia spoke squeamishly beside Sungchul as he inspected the innards.

“You have the preferences of a child.”

“I don’t stake my life for food like you!”

“Only people that have tasted it know how delicious it is. It’s also quite the impressive specimen.”

“Hm. Is that right? I don’t know anything about it. How would it be as an Alchemic ingredient?”

“S grade.”

Sungchul answered briefly as he buried the fresh liver in the snow. He lifted the limp deer with a single hand and tossed it over to an evergreen tree nearby. The massive deer weighing close to a ton flew lightly in the air and struck the tree. Sharp branches pierced the flesh and fixed the deer to the tree.

“Hiii..!”

Bertelgia recoiled in fear. It was a common sight at this point, but today’s preparation method was more vigorous than average. Sungchul decapitated the beast’s head with its magnificent horns, then threw it to the side. He began to strip off the hide with

experienced handiwork.

Riiip! Rip!”

Powerful strength combined with skillful handwork allowed the leather to be stripped away like the peel of a banana. Sungchul tossed the hide over toward the severed head as he began to open up the arteries to drain the blood. As the blood was draining, Sungchul used the time to gather more Blind Man’s Grass. Bertelgia who was watching from the side made a comment.

“No matter what anyone says, no one can deny that you’re diligent.”

“Of course.”

Sungchul tossed the leather onto the gunny sack which he stored into the Soul Storage before speaking. When enough of the blood was drained, Sungchul hefted the deer carcass onto his shoulder and returned to camp.

It wasn’t difficult to recognize the camp of the Crusaders of Salvation from a distance. Sungchul carried the deer toward the camp before a sword-wielding youngster of the Crusaders of Salvation obstructed his path.

“Who are you?”

“I’m just here to deliver the meat.”

Suddenly, he could hear the voice of Sophia Breggas from one of the tents.

“Wait a minute. I’m coming out.”

Sophia came out of the tent while brushing her flowing blonde hair. Sungchul dropped the deer down before the tent when he saw her.

‘Thud.’

The carcass hit the ground with a blunt sound.

“You’ve got some muscle on you.”

“....”

Sophia carefully scanned over the deer that he brought to see if any of the portions were missing. Other than the innards removed from the belly, there was no problem. The most important portion, the tail meat, was safe and there was no sign of any other cuts being removed. Sophia nodded after a long inspection.

“You’ve done well. You can leave now.”

At that moment, the voice of a young man could be heard.

“Hey, Sophia. It isn’t right to turn away a guest like this.”

It was the voice of Elijah Breggas. Sophia quickly turned away and muttered to herself.

“Shit. Did he overhear?”

“...”

Sungchul didn’t refuse the invitation and made his way to the tent. By the time Sophia hastily tried to stop him, he was already half way inside.

The tent was roomy and cozy. At the center burned a tribal style of a campfire with stylish furniture and carpet decorating the interior. It was an opulent scene befitting the name Breggas.

“We meet again, Mr Number 34.”

Elijah was showing Sungchul favor for one reason or another. Sungchul bowed his neck before throwing out a question.

“What do you want from me?”

Elijah smiled brightly at this question.

“Nothing much. The memory of the delicious dish you served last time lingered with me. Especially the black mass that softly melted in my mouth still lingers on my tongue.”

Sungchul silently listened to his words as he thought smugly.

‘Is he talking about the Man-faced Beast stew? This kid knows how to appreciate good food.’

Elijah continued to speak.

“I’ve lost my appetite of late, and I haven’t enjoyed any tasty food. I’m not being boastful, but my home in Trowin has a Chef with a rare Chef class.”

“A rare Chef class?”

“Yes. You might have never heard of it. They are people blessed by the God of Taste. Regardless of everything else, they are at the peak in cooking. Anyways, I just can’t seem to regain my appetite regardless of food or scenery. But, I seem to have regained some of it after having tasted your food.”

“I see.”

It wasn’t wrong to say the sour taste of kimchi helps with appetite.

“Seeing as I have been treated by you before, I want to treat you this time. My sister says that she wants to show off some of her skills. How would you like to try it with me?”

It was a sudden proposition. Sungchul immediately began to suspect whether Elijah was plotting something sinister.

‘I didn’t detect any malintent nor suspicious activity. Did they discover my identity?’

Sungchul held his breath and began to sense his surroundings. He didn’t feel any outstanding aura that might be able to harm him.

“Brother, why are you speaking such nonsense. This man is just one of the prisoners.”

As Sungchul was carefully scanning his surroundings, he could hear the annoyed voice of Sophia who had been standing to the side. Elijah laughed without restraint while calming his sister.

“Didn’t mother say that what goes around comes around regardless of their status? I was treated to a meal, and didn’t that bring back my appetite?”

Sophia didn’t look satisfied, but she couldn’t win against her brother’s stubbornness.

“Consider yourself lucky, criminal!”

After throwing her harsh words toward Sungchul, she left the tent.

“My sister has her flaws, but she is truly a kind child.”

Elijah smiled with his eyes as he spoke softly. Sungchul still couldn't determine his motives.

‘Why is this kid trying to hold me here?’

Elijah didn't seem to have anything waiting in ambush nor did the boy have much personal strength. Sungchul couldn't figure out how Elijah was planning on holding him here. It was a rare moment when Sungchul felt deeply puzzled by his circumstance. A plot of such cleverly disguised and hidden motives was something only the Emperor of the Human Empire was able to conceive, but he decided to handle this calmly. He had faith in his strength to break through any deception or plot.

He shut his mouth and waited for time to pass. Sophia entered the tent again after some time. There were servants carrying dishes with food behind her. Sungchul's eyes grew wide in terror the moment he saw the dish.

‘T-this is...?!’

Rather than food, it was something more close to a pile of charcoal. Sungchul held the fork with trembling hands as he put

whatever this mass was to his lips. The basic ability of Chef, Taste Appraisal, did not activate.

‘...This isn’t food!’

Chapter 82 – Invasion Of The Demonic Realm (2)

Elijah Breggas had a magnanimous expression on his face as he struggled to chew on whatever inedible thing it was with a smile in his eyes. It was because Sophia was watching him like a hawk. Sungchul discovered that Elijah's eyebrows trembled each time he put that black charcoal into his mouth. It was a superhuman resilience. Or at least that's what Sungchul believed.

When half of whatever this was had been tucked in, Elijah looked directly at Sungchul and spoke in a soft voice.

“This is truly delicious, but I feel like I want to try something different. I am truly sorry for asking this of a guest, but could I try another one of your dishes?”

It was only now that Sungchul fully realized the circumstances surrounding him.

‘This guy... he called me over so he could eat some human cooking.’

Fine. Sungchul pushed aside the food he only took a single bite of and rose from his seat.

“You're not trying to make that rank smelling red dish, are you? I'll say this once. I hate food like those of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights.”

Sophia's cold words struck him in the back as he prepared to leave the tent. Sungchul looked over his shoulder to gaze at her cooking. The charcoal on her plate hadn't shrunk at all from the time it had been first served.

‘This woman...’

He had a lot to say, but he suppressed it all. True chefs speak with their food, not with their mouth. Sungchul pulled out the fresh liver from the gunny sack placed outside the tent.

‘This should do just fine.’

The kitchen was a bit off from the back of the tent. Despite being a mobile kitchen, it was still fully stocked with various kinds of spices, vegetables, and wines as expected of upper nobility. Sungchul grabbed one of the bottles and called over to the servant manning the fire.

“Can I use this?”

The servant nodded. Sungchul popped the cork and took a whiff. It wasn't a high-class wine, but it wasn't cheap either. It was adequate for cooking.

He smeared the pan with butter, and then he began to stir fry some onions and tomatoes. When the onions and tomatoes were ready, Sungchul pulled out some Worcester sauce that was

prepared before from his Soul Storage and added it to the pan. He waited for the sauce to reduce before he began adding the wine without restraint.

The servant who had been completely ignoring Sungchul beside the fire was naturally drawn to the food. It was because of the indescribable smell emitting from the pan. As the red wine was being simmered, Sungchul sought out the rest of the ingredients. He found potatoes and rice. He diced the potatoes and powderized the rice.

Wham! Wham!

His hands alone were enough to crush the rice grain. The servant's eyes grew wide.

“Wow you must be quite strong.”

“...”

Sungchul prepared another pan with plenty of oil and began to fry the freshly cut potatoes coated in rice powder.

While the potatoes were cooking, the red wine sauce had reduced somewhat and was giving off an appetizing scent.

Sungchul placed the saucepan at the center of the fire and began cooking the all-important liver.

The main point was searing the surface with strong heat, and then simmering the liver in the previously prepared red wine sauce.

“Do you have sugar?”

Sungchul suddenly asked the servant.

“Yes. Right over here.”

“Thanks. By the way, I was wondering something. What’s your lady’s favorite dish?”

“That is... what did she call it? I heard it was a dish from the other world. She enjoys eating fried cod battered in flour with a side fried potatoes.”

“An English palate.”

Sungchul retorted coldly before focusing on cooking once again.

It would take a bit of time before the deer liver could properly absorb the thick red wine sauce so he began plating. Sungchul prepared a simple salad that was to be served along with the breaded fries as the sides to the soon-to-be prepared marinated deer liver.

Once the fire was weakened for the final reduction of the sauce, the entire area plunged into a serene silence.

“Your cooking ability must be quite impressive?”

The servant suddenly popped a question.

“Of course. I’m actually...”

Sungchul smiled faintly as he pulled out a brooch from his Soul Storage. It displayed a cute dragon holding a knife and a fork while radiating a golden light and a mysterious aura.

“What is this?”

The servant asked again.

‘He must not know about the Chef’s symbol.’

What Sungchul pulled out was the Chef’s symbol that could only be possessed by those of the Chef class. It couldn’t be passed on to anyone else and provided no inherent benefits, but to chefs, this item was as precious as one’s own face. This symbol was the proof of one’s culinary abilities. Average chefs would have one with a cast iron tint, but as one’s skills improved the brooch’s color became more brilliant. In the case of Sungchul, it was the golden light of a High-Class Chef. It was a level that one could not help but be proud of.

“...it’s nothing.”

Sungchul spoke as such before pinning the brooch onto his front pocket.

“Ouch!”

While he pinned the brooch onto his pocket, it must have poked Bertelgia.

“W-what was that sound?”

The servant who heard the scream jumped up and began to look around frantically.

“Could it be a rat?”

The servant grabbed a broom and quickly left the kitchen.

“That hurt!”

As soon as the servant left, Bertelgia complained furiously.

“....”

Sungchul didn't apologize. Instead, he quietly stirred the pan and focused his attention on cooking.

“Arrr... Really! Have some dignity!”

The sauce on the pan was thick, but it needed to be boiled further. Sungchul didn't rush and continued to watch over his cooking as he waited for the right moment.

It was in this quiet moment when he heard sounds of whispers from the other side of the tent.

“I heard the news that the battlefield held by the Order of the Iron Blood Knights was obliterated. Two of the Moving Fortress that they boasted about were destroyed, and the villages were being raided.”

It was the voice of Sophia Breggas. Sungchul began to contemplate on the news as he lightly stirred the pan.

‘I also heard that the state of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights wasn't so good, but for it to have reached the point of the villages that maintained their supplies to have been raided. They were truly a candlelight before the storm.’

The strangest part about the ordeal was Martin Breggas' reaction. Rationally, one must pull together the excess forces from the other frontlines towards any breakages, but he had leisurely sent away the Crusaders of Salvation. It might be less odd if the Crusaders

had been sent to the Order of the Iron Blood Knights.

“Couldn’t we just go back? I’ll be honest. I don’t trust that mage.”

Sophia continued to speak, and a mumbling voice followed. It was a voice that was too quiet to be heard clearly, but Sungchul focused on his hearing to listen in. It was Elijah’s voice.

“... We don’t have any other options. Think of this as our last resort. If we go back now, it’ll only go the way that man wanted.”

“But...”

“That mage... even I don’t have much faith in him, but remember this, the only method to our salvation lies in the Demon Realm.”

Sungchul couldn’t hear anymore; the conversation ended there.

The sauce was done simmering. The faint smell of food burning brought Sungchul back to reality.

‘Those siblings. They definitely weren’t going to the Demonic Realm on a whim.’

He couldn’t determine what they were seeking yet, but even the discovery of their motive of entering the Demonic Realm was a

great boon. At the very least, this trip into the Demonic Realm wouldn't simply be to collect some Alchemic ingredients.

Sungchul placed the deer liver soaked in steaming wine sauce last.

“H-how could this... this flavor...! I'm touched.”

The effect of the dish was great. Different than the practiced smile Elijah held during his sister's cooking, his face exploded with life as he devoured his meal.

“How could there be a liver dish on a noble's table...”

Sophia didn't look pleased. Sungchul quietly revealed the golden brooch hidden under his coat as he spoke.

“Why not just give it a try?”

Sungchul let his brooch peek out as he crossed his arms and looked toward the sibling with an expression full of leisure.

“Sophia, what's wrong? Just try it. It's truly delicious. This might even be better than what we ate at our home.”

Elijah spoke after he had already finished half his meal as he took another sip of his wine. Sophia didn't look pleased, but she finally sliced off a piece of the dark liver and took to her lips.

“..?!”

It was only for a brief instant, but the pale skin of her cheeks became rosy pink.

‘D-delicious...?’

The moment it entered her mouth, the deer liver melted on her tongue and all of the meaty juices hidden within performed a symphony of flavors with the wine. The ill-willed sister who had been intending on taking a bite before tossing the rest away found herself addicted to this strange man’s dish.

It wasn’t only the deer liver that was delicious. The fried potatoes battered in rice powder that adorned the outside of the dish was crispy and synergized well with the softness of the deer liver, and even the salad offered a refreshing sensation that didn’t fall behind.

The Breggas siblings emptied their dishes not long after. Elijah wore a satisfied expression on his face as he wiped his lips, and turned to ask his sister.

“How was it? Wasn’t it amazing?”

Sophia let out a haughty snort in reply as she answered.

“It’s not inedible.”

Her reply was curt, but her words had no impact as her plate was sparkling clean. When the meal had ended, Elijah praised Sungchul’s skills as he handed him a gold coin as payment.

“It’s not much, but it is from my heart.”

As he said so, he continued to request another meal despite Sophia’s glare in protest. Sungchul generously accepted. He found an interest in the offspring of Martin Breggas. He figured that, although he did not know why the children of a celebrity decided to head into the demonic realm despite the dangers, following them could potentially lead to great rewards.

“Call me any time. I’ll be happy to put my skills to use.”

Sungchul said as such before he let the golden brooch under his coat peek out a little more. However, the siblings never noticed it.

—

The Crusaders of Salvation and the Suicide Unit continued on their path towards the Demonic Realm as the day ended. They passed through the rugged mountains after an hour and found themselves in front of a desert surrounded by a crimson light that extended toward the horizon. This land known as The Land that Swallowed the Sun had little sunlight and high precipitation with frosty winds which was starkly different than a normal desert, but

it was still quite a vast desert. The secret behind the heat was buried in the sand.

The sands extending as far as the eye could see were hot all year round. It was because the sands were being cooked from below by geothermal activity which is why the demons remained active in this region despite being winter. Furthermore, the infamous 'Sand Hell of Death' spawned here as well. The terrifying monster Sajators had witnessed still lived here thousands of years later.. Anyone with half a wit would know to never step foot in this land that swallowed the sun, but instead, would choose to walk the waterfront with solid earth and lower temperatures. However, this expedition ignored such sound logic.

“Time is money. We shall take the shortcut through the desert to save time!”

A guide in name only, Aaron Genghis had chosen the worst possible marching route. One through the crimson desert. The veterans caused a small ruckus, but they were a minority. Also, Aaron led the charge in order to assert his decision.

“As long as I am in front, we shall overcome any obstacle!”

A dark shadow loomed over the veteran soldiers as Aaron shouted his words of inspiration.

“Can someone talk to the young leader? It is looking like that rockhead is going to throw everyone including the Crusaders of Salvation into the maws of the Sand Hell!”

Arkaard looked around and cried out words of protest, but he was just a criminal. It was impossible for him to gain an audience with the leader of the Crusaders, the heir of the Breggas family. There was just one exception. Sungchul Kim.

He snuck in to seek Elijah and reported the situation.

“Hmmm. Is that the truth?”

Elijah looked indifferent on the outside, but the effect of Sungchul’s words was clear. Sungchul watched the Breggas boy scolding Aaron where all the soldiers could see.

“Do you think of me an idiot, Aaron?”

Aaron could only keep his head down as Elijah continued to scold him. A new marching path through the waterfront was decided.

Chapter 83 – Invasion Of The Demonic Realm (3)

Broken chariots and military equipment covered in dust or canvas littered the fields. These were debris left behind by previous incursions into the Demon Realm. The seaside was known to be safer when compared to the crimson desert, but that didn't remove its inherent dangers.

There were monsters with bodies of half-man and half-fish along these shores of the Demon Realm that were lying in ambush by the command of the devils. They were the Merfolk with the body of fish and the limbs of man. Whenever they prepared to spring their ambush, the shores would be covered in a sickening stench.

Just like now.

The awful smell came from all sides. Aaron felt the ambush was imminent and ordered the forces to take defensive positions. Sungchul and the veterans stood at the center of the formation as they watched the shores. Between the black waves, the ominous sight of writhing scales was visible. The Merfolk must be looking for an opportunity to strike as they prepared their battle formations.

As this uneventful confrontation was unfolding itself, Arkaard held a picture before Sungchul. It was the illustration of a female dwarf that resembled him.

“How is she?”

Arkaard asked all of a sudden.

“It’s my little girl. Isn’t she beautiful?”

The aesthetic sense of dwarves differed greatly from the other races.

“....”

Sungchul didn’t say anything. Arkaard simply muttered to himself as though he had never expected a reply to begin with and gazed sentimentally over to the endlessly stretching red desert.

“I suppose this’ll be the last time I get to see this blasted desert.”

“....”

“The way I see it. You’re a good man, Number 34.”

Arkaard had suddenly begun to act like someone staring death in the face. Even Bertelgia, who had been listening to the conversation from her pocket, began to shake lightly and whispered to Sungchul.

“That Dwarf. Why’s he acting like that? He’s raising a death flag all by himself.”

“.... leave him.”

Sungchul decided to let things be.

It finally happened. Piercing shouts rang out from all directions.

“Merfolk! The Merfolk are here!”

Large fish heads began to fill the shore. The Merfolk trod onto the sandy beach on flimsy human legs each wielding primitive weapons such as metal hooks, clubs, or rusted spears. Their individual combat strength wasn't anything impressive, but their sheer number made up for that. The shoreline was soon filled with thousands of Merfolks.

“There is nothing to fear.”

Aaron stood at the front as always. He held his hand over his scabbard waiting for the Merfolks to attack. It was to take advantage of the fact that the further they left the water the weaker they became.

On the other side, the Crusaders of Salvation were positioned in the rear of the Suicide Unit. Elijah had expressed his wish to join the fray, but Aaron reassured him that the Suicide Unit would be enough for such pathetic enemies and positioned him in the rear.

“Will it be ok? To leave them to that person?”

Sophia who stood protectively at Elijah’s side quietly questioned the decision.

“Aaron might be a corrupt commander, but he has the skills to back it up. If only he had been more reasonable with accepting bribes, he might have been able to hold a powerful position during his time in the Ancient Kingdom. But...”

A thread of suspicion lingered in Elijah’s eyes.

‘The one to nominate that Aaron Genghis as the escort was my father, Martin Breggas. I don’t know what kind of under-the-table dealings went on, but I will not lower my guard until the very end.’

Elijah relegated himself to the safety of the rear, but he still commanded his unit to be prepared to enter combat at any moment.

Even during this brief moment, the Merfolks were continuously being reinforced. The scouts that had been counting the number of Merfolks gave up and announced a rough estimate in a booming voice.

“Merfolks have exceeded 5000! I repeat, over 5000!”

The rookies of the Suicide Unit that heard the figures began to tremble. They were more than a bit outnumbered. The estimated

number of the Merfolk kept climbing, nearing the 8000s.

The wide open shore became filled with Merfolk and the atrocious stench that followed them. Arkaard who hated eating fish began to dry-heave.

“Shit! Those fish heads! They gotta learn to wash themselves!”

The number of Merfolk eventually stopped at 8000. The new recruits trembled at the mere number, but Aaron began to laugh in a loud voice.

“Just enough to get warmed up!”

He positioned his unit behind the dunes protruding from the sand and protected them by building a barricade from the flotsam scattered on the shore. The unit formed a rectangular formation with the most veteran soldiers and him in the front where the attack was expected to be most concentrated, while the remaining three sides would be defended by the rookies. It was a decent strategy, or so Sungchul believed.

The Merfolk soon began their attack with a strange battlecry. Thousands of Merfolks crawled along the hot sand. The recruits were filled with terror, but the veterans like Aaron looked unfazed. It was because the Merfolk were not only weak and wielded primitive weapons, but they were also quite dumb.

“Byurururu!”

They only had a single strategy in their arsenal. Continuously pummel the enemy with sheer numbers. The Merfolks were making their monstrous cries as they assaulted every side, but they didn't even manage to make the slightest dent in the defensive formation as they fell before the shield wall.

Stab! Slash!

The shield wall took the initial charge of the Merfolk after which the axes and spears tore through their flesh. The Merfolks fell down the dunes in a bloody mess, hitting their comrades in the process.

“All those who can use magic! The time is now! Hit them with all you've got!”

Aaron saw a crack in the enemy's battle formation and ordered all of his forces to concentrate their attack. They bombarded the merfolk with fireballs causing them to fly off with force. The faltering assault of the Merfolk was obliterated in a single magical barrage. Everything was exemplary... up to this point. But soon problems began to arise.

“Good! Very good! Let's make use of this momentum and drive these bastards back to the sea!”

Aaron pulled out his sword without hesitation and shouted a foolhardy command.

“All forces! Follow me! Charge!”

He unraveled his own impregnable defense and ordered all of his soldiers to take on the entire might of the Merfolk army head first of his own volition.

“Die!”

Aaron’s sword, steeped in Sword Aura, mowed down dozens of Merfolk with a single swing. The Merfolk were not an enemy to a powerful Sword Master like Aaron. There were fountains of blood everywhere he went as corpses of Merfolk began to pile.

“Go! Let’s sweep them up in a single blow! I’ll immediately graduate anyone from the Suicide Unit that is able stand out!”

The recruits grew excited after hearing those words and broke the defensive formation to follow behind him toward the center of the Merfolk army. The Suicide Unit with Aaron at the helm split the Merfolk army down the middle. It was a heroic charge in every sense of the word, but it was also extremely premature. The Merfolk army still had thousands strong, and they had only lost their vanguard forces.

“Why’s he acting like this again?”

Only the veterans were left guarding the dune. They felt the ominous feeling that came chronically with being under Aaron

Genghis' command.

“ ... ”

Sungchul looked objectively at the situation, and it cemented his previous suspicions.

‘Is he doing this purposely?’

Because Aaron had always stood at the vanguard fighting bravely it wasn't evident before, but this time Sungchul clearly saw it; the insidious malintent hidden behind his courage and valor. Sungchul wasn't sure what his motives were, but he was sure that Aaron was leading his own troops to their demise. He had done so before, and he was doing it again.

“Byururururu!!!”

“Byururu!!”

The Merfolks that had been split in half regained their composure and surrounded the Suicide Unit that had charged deep into their forces. Aaron who had been boldly fighting like a lion became shriveled as though his previous self was but an illusion.

“Everyone organize! Organize! Maintain the ring formation and face the enemy!”

The Aaron in Sungchul's eyes had more than enough strength to meet the enemy. If he desired, he could force his way through the enemy forces to save his own troops and break open a path. But this did not come to pass.

“Kwaaak!”

“Uwaaak!”

One by one, the members of the Suicide Unit succumbed to the unending tide of the Merfolk army. Even the veterans that had not followed the charge were met by the resumed assault of the Merfolk.

“That damned rockhead bastard!”

Arkaard swung his axe mightily lopping off three Merfolk heads as he spat out curses. Another Merfolk leapt at him in this brief interim. Arkaard instantly lost all of his strength as his eyes flew wide open. Right at the moment he was about to die, an arrow flew like lightning and struck the Merfolk in the skull. He turned toward the direction from which the arrow came. A woman wearing a white coat with an elegant motif over her breastplate was nocking another arrow. It was Sophia Breggas; the sister of the leader of the Crusaders of Salvation.

“Keep fighting, Dwarf.”

The Crusaders of Salvation that had been observing from the rear

had decided to join the battle. They might be younger than the average soldier, but each one of them was a fighter trained from their childhood as they were all from respectable families. Once they joined the battle, the tide of battle shifted once again even if the battle did not immediately end.

When the Merfolks finally retreated back to the sea, leaving behind countless piles of corpses on the sandy beach, the 300 members of the Suicide Units were reduced down to less than half their original numbers. Aaron returned once again without a single injury on him. He approached Elijah with a defeated expression on his face after a brief mourning of his troops that were sent tragically to their graves early.

“I have no excuses.”

At this point, Elijah made a cold decision.

“I don’t need your help anymore. We will go our own way from this point on, so I would appreciate it if you could disappear from my sight immediately.”

Aaron had already lost more than half of his forces, and his incompetence was openly revealed. There was not a single reason for the two units to remain together. Aaron retreated without raising his head. His cheeks were burning at this public humiliation, but he didn’t immediately order his men back to base. The sun was setting, and they had to break camp for the night.

He set up camp apart from the Crusaders of Salvation, and when

darkness fell, Aaron gathered his troops. It was a pitiful number that barely broke 130, so it didn't take very long. When all of the men were gathered, Aaron finally revealed his face. It was a face filled with confidence which was in contrast to his expression during his humiliation.

“Shameless bastard.”

Several soldiers mocked him under their breath, but Aaron didn't mind it at all. Instead, he smirked. He smirked widely enough to show his pearly white teeth. It was then a different question arose in the soldiers' minds.

‘Did he finally snap?’

On the contrary to the popular opinion, Aaron did not go crazy.

“You all have survived the last battle and thusly have proven yourselves as worthy warriors.”

It was an unexpected sermon. Aaron noticed several soldiers looking at him quizzically, and so he continued his speech.

“Today, I sifted out the main forces. As a result, the incompetent and stupid were filtered out. Thankfully, our shares of the rewards have also increased.”

The soldiers couldn't grasp at what Aaron was alluding to, but as they kept listening, Aaron's announcement made their blood

freeze.

“Tonight. We shall strike the Crusaders of Salvation.”

Everyone’s mouth became shut as they stared blankly at Aaron’s face, but Aaron remained indifferent. One of the men raised a hand. It was the stocky Dwarf, Aakard.

“You’re going to strike at the son of Martin Breggas? Are you preparing to turn us all into traitors?”

All anyone could think was that Aaron was trying to exact revenge for the humiliation he endured, but the truth was far from their expectation. Aaron pulled out a single document from his possession.

“The one that made this order was Martin Breggas. The Lord Marquis himself.”

Aaron left it at that and opened the document for his subordinates to see.

[I command Aaron Genghis thusly.]

[Kill all of the Crusaders of Salvation. Leave none alive.]

[Especially, Elijah Breggas, the Follower of Calamity, must die.]

[Lord Marquis of Trowyn, Martin Breggas]

It was a formal document adorned magnificently with specks of gold that was not something that could be forged overnight on a whim. Sungchul could also see with his Eye of Truth that the magical signature on the document was authentic.

“The purpose of sacrificing half of the unit was as I stated before. It was to cull the weak and make the enemy lower their guard.”

Aaron’s tone drastically changed. In stark contrast to his nickname, he smoothly continued on like a cunning snake

“Tonight, those brats in the Crusaders of Salvation shall meet us completely unprepared.”

Aaron looked toward the camp of the Crusaders situated not so far away. There were delicious aromas and sensuous music flowing from that direction. There were a few sentries standing guard, but overall, their vigilance was more than lacking.

Aaron glared toward the camp of the Crusaders as he continued speaking.

“Kill those brats in their beds. Rape the girls if you want. All the valuables on their persons will be up for grabs. Finally, every one of you will be granted freedom upon success of this mission. By the name of the Lord Marquis.”

Chapter 84 – Tome Of The High Devil (1)

When a situation began to get out of hand, Sungchul always had the same answer; nip the problem at its source. As the Suicide Unit was preparing for their midnight raid, Sungchul approached Aaron.

Aaron was sitting in his chair while wiping his sword with a solemn expression on his face. He turned his gaze towards the entrance when he detected Sungchul's presence befitting his title of Swordmaster. He then spoke in a commanding voice.

“Who is it?”

Aaron finally remembered who Sungchul was as he entered the tent.

“You... you're that patrolman, right?”

He had completely forgotten about Sungchul. As the incident within the Underground Kingdom had been so traumatic, Aaron didn't have the peace of mind to care for each individual incident such as those concerning a mere scout.

“Yes. What is it, Number 34?”

Sungchul kept his points brief.

“I came by the order of Willie Gilford.”

Clang.

The sword clattered to the floor. Not a single drop of blood remained in Aaron’s pale face.

“W-what did you just say?”

He spoke in a trembling voice.

“Willie Gilford has sent me.”

Sungchul’s expression remained unchanged, and Aaron’s spine broke out in cold sweat.

‘Did... Willie Gilford survive?!’

He had abandoned the powerhouse of the Ancient Kingdom, Willie Gilford, to die in the Underground Kingdom. Willie was not known for mercy; he was famous for seeking revenge for even the pettiest of grudges. It was because Aaron knew Willie best that he was suffering from anxiety for a whole month in his room after returning from the Underground Kingdom.

Thankfully, there was no news from the Underground Kingdom after all this time, and so he had begun to negotiate with various factions until he finally managed to tie himself with Martin

Breggas. He believed that after this mission he would be under the protection of a powerful ally who could shelter him from Willie Gilford, but the name he did not want to hear ever again was mentioned in the middle of carrying out the mission.

“W-w-why did Willie Gilford s-send you here?”

Aaron asked as he reached for his fallen sword with a trembling hand. Sungchul replied with an apathetic voice.

“He has already arrived nearby.”

“Waaak!”

Aaron let out a scream. Sungchul laughed to himself upon seeing Aaron squirm.

‘As expected. He’s deathly afraid of Willie.’

Sungchul spoke again in a softer voice towards the terrified Aaron.

“Willie spoke thusly. He has no intention of harming you but has one request. Have no fear; he only wishes to see you, immediately.”

“A r-request?”

Aaron's eyes that were once filled with terror found hope. Relying on him for a task was equivalent to saying that he was forgiven.

“Yes. Immediately.”

Sungchul emphasized that last word. Aaron quickly sheathed his blade and rose from his seat.

“Where is he now? Willie Gilford that is...”

“He and Mikhael Gilford are currently at the seaside.”

“Is that right? I got it. I'll head toward there now.”

Suddenly, Aaron felt a twinge of suspicion rise in his mind. How did this soldier become affiliated with Willie Gilford? The only person that was aware of his brief service under Willie Gilford was the Empath that he kept beside him. The rest were killed within the cold corridors of the Underground Kingdom. However, this was not the time to mess about with these minor details. Regardless of whether this was the truth or not, he had to investigate the matter. If not, he would forever live in agony worrying about Willie Gilford behind his back for the rest of his life.

“So where is he?”

Aaron rushed Number 34. Number 34 walked quite briskly, but

to Aaron, he might as well have been walking at the pace of a tortoise.

“Run, Number 34! I’m in quite the hurry!”

“I understand.”

Number 34 began to run. It was a fast pace, but it couldn’t possibly compare to Aaron’s. No, it is more correct to say that it shouldn’t have been possible for him to outpace Aaron. But when Aaron tried to close the distance by speeding up, Number 34 quickened even further and kept the distance the same. It was good that Number 34 was moving quickly, but something was not right.

‘Why the fuck is this kid so fast? Did he eat something unusual today?’

The two of them finally arrived at the seaside filled with rotting merfolk flesh.

“It’s here.”

A scarlet moon hung in the sky as the blood stained tide washed upon the sandy beach. Aaron looked around his surroundings. The only two people standing were Number 34 and himself. As the clouds slowly covered the moon, Aaron spoke again.

“Where is Willie Gilford?”

Number 34 turned around in reply. Something popped out of his pocket and began to fly by flapping her pages. On a closer inspection, it was a book.

‘What is this?’

As things were growing more odd, Number 34 pulled something from the air. It was a hammer with a long handle.

‘A Soul Storage?!’

As the clouds retreated, the moonlight fell upon the sand for the second time. The light shone upon the hammer revealing its full form in all its glory. All the alarms went off in Aaron’s mind as he saw the hammer.

‘I have to run.’

Someone like Willie Gilford was long since gone from his mind. The person standing before him was the Enemy of the World who made the world tremble with his name. Someone that little Willie couldn’t compare to.

Aaron, who always fought on the frontlines against mob creatures but retreated at the first sight of a powerful foe, found no way out this time. He was shoved into the sand before he managed to take three steps away from where he stood.

Aaron who was buried into the sand was then pulled out.

‘Ssssk’

His face flushed as it spewed sand out from every crevice.

“S-spare me!”

He prostrated himself onto the beach and begged for his life.

“....”

Sungchul looked at him apathetically for awhile before opening his mouth to speak.

“Explain everything that’s happening right now.”

Aaron followed the command to the letter. He revealed everything that he knew was occurring and will occur with no details spared. From his report, Sungchul learned two things: the internal struggles within the Breggas household and the situation regarding Elijah Breggas. It appeared that Martin wanted to make his bastard son his heir, and when he pressured Elijah, it was said that Elijah turned to the Followers of Calamity. The personal accounts of each side weren’t known, but the rumor is that Elijah met with the head of the Followers of Calamity.

“The leader of the Followers of Calamity?”

This was the first time Sungchul had heard of this. The Followers of Calamity was a sporadic movement from its conception, and their organizational structure didn't allow for a leader. Grand Mage Balzark, the man who Sungchul killed a while back, might have held enough importance to be called the center of the movement, but other than him, there wasn't anyone worthy of being called the leader.

'I will have to talk to Elijah directly about this one.'

A cold light appeared in Sungchul's eyes. Aaron who was still prostrated before him continued to pour out his heart in a pathetic voice.

"Yes. This expedition into the Demon Realm was requested by Elijah Breggas, who had come in contact with the Followers of Calamity, of Martin Breggas. There definitely is some kind of scheme in play here. It was why Lord Martin left the disposal of this problem to me."

"I see."

Sungchul began to fidget with the handle of the hammer as he lorded over Aaron. Aaron's heart trembled at even the slightest movement of the shadow drawn by Fal Garaz. He tactfully gauged the mood as he carefully spoke once again.

"T-that is all I know, Destroyer."

Sungchul gave Aaron a frosty glare. The man was vile and selfish, but he had his uses.

Sungchul chose to keep him alive for now.

“Cease the attack on the Crusaders of Salvation.”

“What...? That’s...”

Aaron showed some resistance, and so Sungchul pulled out a box filled with various gems, gold and silver treasures before him.

“T-This is?!”

Treasures that he might have never seen in his life was laid out before him. His eyes grew wide.

“I heard that you were chased out of the Ancient Kingdom on bad terms. Is that true?”

Sungchul asked in a low voice. Aaron lowered his head and replied.

“That’s correct, sir.”

“Can you return to the Ancient Kingdom with this?”

“Of course!”

Anything was possible with this amount of wealth. It was enough to restore his place within the Ancient Kingdom as he truly wanted. The wealth that laid before him was enough to make even the worst of enemies into the best of friends.

Sungchul watched Aaron’s constantly changing reactions with a cold gaze.

“Also, Willie Gilford that you were so deathly afraid of died in the Underground Kingdom.”

“W-Was it done by the hands of Sir Destroyer?”

“I didn’t lay a finger on him, but he did die.”

A brief expression of relief passed over Aaron’s face. The greatest obstacle in his path had disappeared. Aaron finally had to weigh his options. The answer was clear.

“This Genghis Aaron shall follow the will of the Destroyer.”

The situation drew to a close with this. Aaron ceased the attack on the Crusaders of Salvation and withdrew his troops. The men who were excited at the prospects of plunder began to complain, but Aaron paid them no mind.

“That person. Is it ok like this? Shouldn’t we get a covenant out of him or something? He might blab to someone that you’re here.”

Bertelgia made her concerns known, but Sungchul looked indifferent.

“We don’t have to worry. He won’t say anything even at the cost of his life.”

If the truth that he has had dealings with the Enemy of the World was revealed, then Aaron would be finished anyways. It was unlikely that this truth would ever be leaked except as a very last resort.

Sungchul looked over at the retreating soldiers dispassionately.

‘It looks like there’s no reason for me to stick around here any longer.’

He had stayed as long as he wanted and accomplished a fair bit. He wanted to say farewell to his squadmates with whom he had spent time with, but in the end, all of that felt meaningless to Sungchul who had tossed aside the world. Sending the Suicide Unit back was the most he could do for them. Sungchul’s eyes were now set on the other side where the Crusaders of Salvation were camped.

When the sun rose, the Crusaders of Salvation planned to resume their journey towards the Demon Realm. Sungchul and Bertelgia followed their tracks from a distance. They crossed the crimson desert after a quarter of the day and arrived at a belt of sunken rocks and glaciers.

The Entrance to the Demon Realm: It was the invasion path of the Devils. Tension rose within the Crusaders of Salvation. They could face the great armies of the Devils at any moment.

However, there was a well-known gatekeeper to the entrance of the Demon Realm; the Deep Sea Demon.

The monster that Sungchul had used to practice his magic on a weekly basis had heard the marching of the Crusaders of Salvation and emerged from the ground to intimidate the army. This creature was nothing more than a training dummy for Sungchul, but it was a formidable enemy to the Crusaders.

‘Should I see how they handle this?’

Sungchul watched the confrontation between the Deep Sea Demon and the Crusaders of Salvation from afar, but it turned out to be a disappointment. The Crusaders couldn’t even properly fight with the creature before their morale broke and they routed. It was an indescribably pitiful defeat.

The Crusaders of Salvation had, as a result, lost a considerable amount of servants and supplies, but their tribulations were yet to

end. An army of demons appeared before them after having barely managed to escape from the Deep Sea Demon. They were cavalry units riding on Helldogs. The Crusaders might have been able to defeat this foe effortlessly, but that would have been the case before they met the Deep Sea Demon.

Countless members of the Crusaders were torn apart by the Helldogs and lost their lives to the serrated blades of the demon soldiers.

“Everyone! To positions! Maintain your formation!”

Elijah flailed about trying to maintain order as the demon cavalry weaved through their formation with ease, but it was to no avail. He would have long since become a cold body had it not been for Sophia who vigilantly protected his side.

‘It looks like they’re having a hard time avoiding complete destruction.’

Sungchul couldn’t stand it much longer and stepped in himself. He suddenly appeared behind the leader of the demons that was directing the troops and snapped his neck with his powerful grip. When the devils saw their leader be instantly killed by a monstrous stranger who appeared out of nowhere, only one name popped into their head as they fled in panic.

“It’s the Destroyer! The Destroyer is here!”

The demon cavalry ceased their attacks and scattered as they ran. Sungchul leisurely approached where the Crusaders of Salvation had been earlier. There were bodies of Helldogs, demons, and Crusaders strewn about the battlefield. He couldn't find any of the surviving Crusaders, but there were scattered prints stretched out towards the south.

‘It looks like they used the moment when I killed the demon to retreat.’

Regardless how chaotic the battle had seemed, it was the eldest son of Martin Breggas of the Continental Champions. There was no way the boy would die here. As he began to contemplate such thoughts, something caught his attention.

“Hm? What’s that?”

As Sungchul continued his path between the corpses, Bertelgia popped out of her pocket to speak. Sungchul turned his head to notice that Bertelgia was hovering over a specific point on the ground. A single book laid under her. It was bound in dark red leather colored like blood and had an ominous presence.

“This thing here. This. thing. It smells really evil?”

Sungchul nodded as he noticed the book.

“It definitely isn’t a normal book.”

Sungchul bent his knee to take a second look at it. When his fingers touched the book, its texture felt familiar.

‘It was bound with human leather.’

The book looked appropriate for demons to use. Sungchul held it and activated Inspection. Information on the book appeared before him.

[Tome of the High Devil: Volume 7]

Grade : Epic

Type : Equipment – Book

Effect : On Equip – Increases Magic Power 20 / Vitality 20

Note : Those who wish to obtain the power of the High Devil must open the tome before

The Altar of Ten Thousand Demons.

Restriction : Mage-related Class

It had low stats considering its grade as an Epic item, and it

didn't even have any additional effects. However, something within the information screen couldn't be overlooked.

‘Power of the High Devil?’

As he reflected on this new information, he sensed the desperate steps of people approaching. Not before long their voices could be heard.

“Brother. This place is dangerous! Let's go back, please?”

It was Sophia's voice. Sungchul hid within the fog hanging over the battlefield and quietly observed them. He soon heard another voice.

“We have to find that book! All of our efforts will be for nothing without the book!”

It was Elijah's voice. He was crawling along the ground with bloodshot eyes searching the battlefield.

Sungchul looked at the book bound with human skin in his hand.

Chapter 85 – Tome Of The High Devil (2)

‘Thwop’

Sungchul dropped the book where it could easily be seen.

Bertelgia saw the book left on the ground and asked in surprise.

“Huh? What are you planning?”

“I think it’ll be good to see how this plays out.”

Sungchul left the book on the ground and hid once again into the fog hanging over the battlefield. Elijah soon arrived.

Elijah had been stumbling around the ground of the battlefield like a blind man when he suddenly broke out into a cheer.

“It’s here! It’s here!”

Only after he had hidden the Tome of High Devils beneath his cloak and fastened it to a clasp on his belt, did Elijah sigh in relief.

“I had really begun to wonder what would have happened from this point on. Really. Everything is pointless without this.”

Sophia just silently guarded her brother as she followed. The

siblings immediately headed back after recovering the book. The Crusaders of Salvation were stationed below a cliff nearby; their lifeless eyes looked towards the Breggas siblings. Lacking the strength to even raise their arms, they simply stared at the siblings without saying a word. As long as the intruders were human it was fine, this was the thought shared between every member.

Sungchul roughly counted the remaining members of the Crusaders of Salvation as he gazed at them. None of the non-combatants remained and not even half of the original hundred members had survived. Most importantly, they had abandoned all of their supplies when they had faced the Deep Sea Demon. Their current state was dire and anyone could easily see that further progress was impossible. Despite all of this, Elijah ordered them to continue once again.

Several complaints rose from the group, but Elijah only dared them to leave. This led to deserters and the Crusaders of Salvation were degraded to a pitiful party that didn't even have ten members. However, Elijah's will wasn't broken. He stroked the Tome of the High Devils hidden beneath his cloak and walked deeper into the Demon Realm with the few that still followed him.

Undoubtedly, they would meet countless tribulations on their path, but at the moment, they needed to pass through the Deep Sea Demon that guarded the entrance to the Demon Realm.

The small group gathered their heads and formulated a plan to sneak past the gatekeeper before he woke. The plan wasn't even worth considering. The area surrounding the Deep Sea Demon was teeming with imps. The imps themselves were no stronger than a

rabid dog, but they would charge towards anything that wasn't a Demon and die with an earsplitting scream. In other words they were like living alarms. It could be considered impossible for the Crusaders to pass through the entrance undetected.

Sungchul went ahead of the Crusaders to where the Deep Sea Demon could be found. In order to call out the Sea Demon, he killed several of the imps that charged towards him.

“Gwuuuuuuh!!!”

With a loud bellow, the Deep Sea Demon shot up towards the surface and found itself recoiling at the sight of his guest. It was the bastard that had savagely pummeled it every week. However, Sungchul didn't use magic this time. He pulled out Fal Garaz and struck the creature with just enough force to keep it alive. A one-sided and terrifying beating began. Only after its skull was cracked and both of its arms were broken, did the Sea Demon fall back below the surface.

Bertelgia carefully asked after witnessing Sungchul's intense beating.

“You sure it's not dead?”

“Deep Sea Demons are dim-witted, but they have extremely strong vitality. Their regeneration is second to none.”

Sungchul turned to look towards the south. He could see the

Crusaders of Salvation bumbling about in the distance trying to walk silently like assassins. Sungchul left the area.

“Kiiii!!”

One of the imps discovered the Crusaders and rushed towards them.

“Shit!”

Elijah quickly drew his blade and cut off the creature’s head. His swordplay was precise and accurate, as expected of Martin Breggas’s son, but it wasn’t quick enough stop the imp’s death throes.

“Kii...? Techaaaaaaaaa!”

Terror filled Elijah’s eyes.

“I cut through his neck directly. Where is this cry coming from?!”

The mission fell to pieces even before it could truly begin.

“Brother. Let’s retreat.”

Sophia spoke in a firm voice, but a small miracle appeared before

them. Despite the imp's terrible scream, the Deep Sea Demon did not reveal himself. Elijah was skeptical, but he pushed forward cautiously once again. Another group of imps discovered them, attacked and got annihilated. This time not just one, but several of them released their death throes as they fell to the ground and died. However, no Deep Sea Demon appeared. Elijah made a decisive decision in the face of this unexpected stroke of fortune.

“Let's break through quickly.”

His decision was ultimately the correct one. They were able to safely pass through the territory guarded by the Deep Sea Demon. The land of fire and ice where lava flowed beyond frozen glaciers entered their sights.

“It's the Demonic Realm. We finally made it into the Demonic Realm.”

Elijah was overcome with emotions as he took in the view of the land of the Demon Realm. The roars of demons could be heard from all directions, but he wasn't discouraged. He stroked the book hidden beneath his cloak and pressed forward once again.

An army of Devils could be seen approaching in the distance; their marching emitted a cloud of dust behind them. Elijah and his unit hid themselves behind rocks which were as sharp as knife blades. Thankfully, the Devils did not discover them.

They continued their march in this fashion. Their progress was slow, and the sun that shone in the hazy skies of the Demon Realm

had begun to set. Night was approaching. Once the sun sets, the Devils hidden behind the cover of the clouds would stretch their wings and roam the skies of the Demon Realm.

The time for the Devils of the Demon Realm, governed only by the rule ‘survival of the fittest’, had begun in earnest. The weak only existed to feed the strong or die to amuse them. Elijah and his group were quite strong among the humans, but they were nothing compared to the swarms of Devils. Human flesh and souls were popular among the Devils. There would be nothing left of them; their body and soul would be plundered by the Devils upon discovery. However, fortune smiled upon them that day.

“...”

The divine armament forged from a fragment of the sky, Fal Garaz. A man watched over them with such a fearsome weapon. An enormous face adorning a hideous smile revealed itself in the clouds. A Devil discovered the Crusaders of Salvation and dove towards them, but Sungchul noticed its actions. The Devil didn’t recognize Sungchul’s face, but it recognized the weapon in his hand. It immediately turned its gaze elsewhere and flew toward the sky once again.

Similar scenes continued to occur within the pitch black darkness of the night, and the Crusaders of Salvation were able to survive through their first night in the Demonic Realm. A problem occurred only after the sun had risen.

Sungchul lowered his guard as he chased off the final Demon with a sharp look when a short scream rang out from the camp of

the Crusaders.

“Uwaaak!”

It was Elijah.

‘Was there a hidden Devil? It can’t be. No Devil should have been able to sneak past by me.’

Sungchul immediately headed toward the camp. The guilty party wasn’t a Devil, but a fellow human. Seven of the Crusaders were fleeing towards the south. Sungchul looked and confirmed that one of them was holding the Tome of the High Devils.

“Kuuh....”

The cries of dying Elijah could be heard. Sungchul immediately headed toward the noise. Elijah had a large sword wound to his abdomen and was lying on the floor.

“Brother! Stay awake! Brother!”

Sophia performed emergency aid beside him, but she herself wasn’t faring that well. There were several cuts of various sizes along her body, and her white outfit was damp with blood.

Sungchul checked his surroundings. There was no one left but the siblings. They were thoroughly abandoned and left to die.

Sungchul recalled an image of himself in the past. Elijah's eyes turned towards him.

“You are...?”

When Sophia heard her brother's words, she turned her head and harshly glared at Sungchul. Sungchul took a look at Elijah's injuries. The affected area was starting to turn black. The poison in his body was weakening him faster than the cut of his wound.

“Move.”

Sungchul commanded. Sophia moved aside as if she was enraptured by the authority in his voice, one that didn't allow for defiance.

Sungchul grabbed a sharp dagger from his Soul Storage and cut open the affected area.

“Krrrk!”

Blood as black as ink poured out of the wound. It was blood tainted by the poison. When Sungchul drained enough of the blood, he applied the antidote towards the injury before applying some healing salve on the affected area. It was good for the body, but it was an incredibly bitter medication that caused Elijah to scream out in terrible pain. He withstood the pain, proving his worth as a son of a Champion of the Continent. Elijah was soon able to overcome the critical juncture.

When the situation had resolved itself to a degree, Sophia opened her mouth first.

“Why are you here?”

“... ”

Sungchul didn't answer.

“What do you seek in the Demonic Realm?”

“How do you...?”

Elijah suddenly interrupted him, but Sungchul asked again with a bit more force.

“I ask again, what are you looking for here?”

His question contained that undefiable authority once again. It was at this moment that a sharp blade was held at Sungchul's neck. It was Sophia's blade.

“Put it away.”

Sungchul simply spoke, and Sophia found her body freezing in fear. However, she was also the offspring of the Sixth Champion.

Despite the overwhelming fear, she held on. In the midst of this tension, an earsplitting cry of a monster rang out from the sky.

“KREWAAAAAAAA!!”

A gigantic bird roaming the skies had discovered a prey on the ground. Sophia who saw the massive wingspan that covered the sky in darkness was frozen in shock.

‘Could that be an Omen of Calamity?’

An Omen of Calamity was one of the most infamous creatures residing in the Demon Realm. They were known to be the most terrifying lifeform and didn’t quite belong to the realm of humanity or the Devils, and they followed above the army of Devils feasting upon human and Devil corpses alike at the end of every battle. They were a scavenger of sorts, but they were carved into the minds of every human as a terrifying symbol of the Calamity due to their incredible size and strength. That Omen of Calamity was flapping its wings as it rapidly dove toward Sungchul’s group. Sophia’s face paled in fear.

‘I can’t stop it!’

She had already lost a majority of her strength fending off the deserters. Her injuries of varying sizes were a drain on her recovery. She might be able to move out of the way to save her own neck, but she wouldn’t be able to save Elijah.

The mysterious man known as Number 34 pulled out a whip that seemed that was as black and red as a burning coal from his Soul Storage. It was a long whip that seemed to extend ten meters from a quick glance. The man pulled out the whip and swung toward the rapidly descending Omen without a moment of hesitation.

‘Idiot. How can you stop that thing with just a whip?’

All of her rationality argued that his actions were meaningless, but Sungchul’s strength defied all logic. Cassandra, the Demonic Weapon, accurately wrapped around the Omen’s neck whose talons were bared toward the ground.

“Kweh?”

The moment when the Omen tilted its head, the whip pulled it towards the ground with overwhelming force slamming it into the ground.

‘Wham!’

The Omen’s head struck the solid piece of bedrock and shattered the ground while its wings were crippled to the point where pieces of broken bone were piercing through its flesh.

Sungchul’s hand that was gripping the whip moved again. The Omen was flung towards the opposite side and it struck the ground once again.

‘Boom!’

“Krweh...”

The Omen convulsed in pain, but Sungchul was a man that knew no mercy.

‘Boom! Boom! Boom!’

With each of Sungchul’s movements, the Omen was continuously smashed onto the ground like a pog and ultimately became embedded into it with its entire body in shambles.

“Hiiii....”

Sophia’s face flushed and grew a shade paler. She had lost all ability to form words in the face of this unbelievable sight that was too incredible to be believed.

‘This human... what’s his identity?’

Countless possibilities passed through her mind, but there was only one name that felt feasible. Horror filled Sophia’s eyes.

‘Could this man be...?’

The blade held in her delicate hand clattered to the floor. Finally,

she managed to speak with a trembling voice.

“You... are the Enemy of the World?”

Sungchul looked directly into her eyes as he nodded.

“I am he.”

Chapter 86 – Tome Of The High Devil (3)

The race that first awakened their magical potential were the Demons. The Demons had an affinity towards magic that allowed them to understand it better and they possessed greater talent towards it. Obsession over magic had eventually caused them to fall, but magical knowledge and powerful spells had been the target of admiration and worship among the Demons. They had all but disappeared now, but there was a time when there were many Devil worshippers. The goal of these Devil worshippers was to shed their lowly and savage human forms to become a Devil themselves. The Tome of the High Devils recorded the secrets of such Devil worshippers.

“...There is a quest of the Devil recorded within.”

They could hide it no longer, and there was no point in doing so. Elijah revealed everything he knew before the Enemy of the World.

“The book acts as a guide to the city of the Devil worshippers hidden within the entrance of the Demon Realm, and when the book is opened on the Altar of Ten Thousand Demons, the person who was once human will receive a High Devil’s quest.”

“It is not a righteous quest. Do you really have to go through with it?”

Sungchul asked in a calm voice.

“I want my revenge even if I have to use the power of the Devils. That person drove mother to her death and tried to have us killed as well.”

A cold fire of vengeance burned in Elijah’s eyes. Sungchul could feel truth within it.

“...Follow me.”

Sungchul led the way. He followed the footsteps of those that fled towards the south. The siblings who were confused by the unexpected actions of the Enemy of the World simply followed suit. They soon found a single human corpse torn to shreds. It was one of the Crusaders of Salvation. Those who had left Sungchul’s protection were immediately subjected to the ambush of Devils and had met pitiful ends as prey.

“Lucas...”

Sophia recognized the corpse and trembled lightly.

“Do you know him?”

Sungchul looked at the mass of bloody hair and flesh on the ground and asked.

“...He was a childhood friend. Even though he did betray us in the end.”

Sungchul continued forward. They soon found another corpse. Not just one, but two of them. These people had been found by an insidious Devil possessing a hundred teeth, and they had died as his chewtoy. Sungchul looked callously toward the demon who had cut up the corpses and was now trying to piece them together with different combinations.

The siblings grimaced at the sight.

“Gil, Jinte...”

These members were also long time friends of theirs. They had also betrayed the siblings, but their pitiful deaths had still left a great shock in the hearts of the Breggas siblings. The Devil with a hundred teeth discovered new humans to play with; he tossed aside the corpses that he had been toying with and bore his hideous teeth.

“Kiii! Kiii! Kiii!”

However, things did not go as the Devil had planned.

Wham!

Sungchul’s fist met with the Devil’s face and all one hundred of its teeth shattered as they poured out of its mouth, carried out by a stream of blood. Sungchul grabbed one of the countless razor sharp teeth lying on the ground and stabbed it into the Devil’s

massive eye.

“Kiiiiii!”

He then pulled out the Devil’s arms in its entirety and threw the crying Devil off into a random direction. The Omens of Calamity began to gather above the head of the Devil who was now crawling across the ground.

“....”

Sungchul who had taken care of the Devil began to walk forward once again without any words. The Breggas siblings could only watch with wide eyes at the back of this man with god-like strength and followed along. As they walked, a sudden thought crossed by Elijah’s mind.

‘Could it be that we only managed to get this far... because this man was nearby?’

His guess was right on point. It was because of this reason that Sungchul didn’t chase after the deserters right away. To leave the veil of protection Sungchul provided in the Demon Realm which equated hell in this world, meant that these deserters would simply return to the bottom rung of the food chain.

Sungchul and the Breggas siblings continued to discover more corpses. They had all met pitiful and gruesome deaths. They had found a single survivor, but he was in a state worse than death

“K-kill me...”

The man begged for death as he had been injected with the eggs of a giant insect, and the larvae of the insect were now eating him from inside out.

Wham!

Sungchul’s hammer immediately shattered the man’s skull. A parasite about as large as a finger bared its fangs as it wriggled about within the skull.

“Uwek...”

Bertelgia who was within Sungchul’s pocket began to wriggle.

“ ... ”

Sungchul left behind the corpse and pressed on.

‘There’s two left.’

It didn’t take long to find the final two. One male and one female. They were alive, but barely. A pale skinned Devil wearing a necklace made of limbs hovered near them as if he was a cloud. The Devil laughed mechanically as he descended creating thunder and lightning around him. A terrifying electric shock struck them.

Sungchul immediately smashed the Devil's skull with his hammer, but it was only after the pair had already been critically wounded.

—

“Uuugggh.”

One of them immediately died. The man with long sideburns let out a pained cry as he looked out towards nothing in particular with his rapidly fading vision. Elijah and Sophia hurriedly ran to his side.

“Kruut!”

Elijah supported and then embraced him. The man's eyes had already lost its sight at this point.

“Elijah. Is that you?”

“Yes. It's me.”

“I'm sorry. I'm... really sorry.”

The man died after leaving behind those words. A heavy silence soon followed. Sungchul recovered the Tome of the High Devils from the dead woman's corpse within this silence. When he held the tome in his hand, a faint line appeared in his vision. It was a faint beam of light that would be easily missed without focus. The

light extended towards the south.

Sungchul handed the tome to Elijah.

“Take it.”

“....”

Elijah had a hesitant expression before receiving the tome.

‘This guy... what are his intentions?’

He could not understand Sungchul’s heart. The man’s motives and goals were all veiled in mystery.

Sungchul noticed the chaos disrupting Elijah’s eyes and spoke his command.

“Lead on. Towards the Devil’s quest.”

Elijah finally understood a bit of what Sungchul wanted. He nodded and led the man to the location where the Devil’s quest awaited them. Curiosity rose in Sungchul’s eyes.

‘There is something in this foggy region...’

The Sea of Fog was one of the places that Sungchul recalled from

his days when he wandered the Demon Realm. The area had nothing special. There were pits of mud scattered about the ground, with monsters resembling drowned corpses waiting to drag victims into the pits. However, Sungchul had the Tome of the High Devils now. The beam of light extending from the Tome of the High Devils acted as a guide that led them through the Sea of Fog where vision was completely obstructed.

Crunch!

Around the time Sungchul crushed the tenth monster with the sole of his military boots, the annoying fog began to dissipate. Sungchul and the Breggas siblings could see towers that seemed to pierce the sky as they left the fog.

There were eight towers in total. The precarious walkways strung like spider webs between the eight towers were dizzying to the eye. Sungchul took another step forward as he looked at the towers.

‘So there were places like this in the Demon Realm.’

Sungchul discovered a figure lingering at the bottom of a tower. Surprisingly, it was a human. Its body had become twisted and disfigured from horrendous torture and body modifications, but Sungchul could easily recognize that the creature carrying a gunny sack was a human. He looked back toward Elijah.

“Where is this?”

Sungchul thought that Elijah, who held the Tome of the High Devils, would know of something. He was bound to have additional information from the person who had given him the book. Some information regarding this city in the Demon Realm that even Sungchul had never seen before, and he had guessed correctly.

“This place... is a city of humans.”

Elijah responded honestly, and curiosity rose in Sungchul’s eyes once again.

“There is a human city in the middle of the Demon Realm?”

“That’s right. It is a city of those that wished to escape their mortal destiny. A gathering place of those that desired to become Devils.”

“You’re saying that this is a city of Devil worshippers?”

Elijah’s eyes grew dark before he nodded to Sungchul’s question.

‘So a place like this existed.’

There weren’t many people among the humans that knew more than Sungchul regarding the Demon Realm. At the very least among the humans of the East. However, Elijah Breggas... no, the person that handed him the book knew of this city’s existence. This was no ordinary person. Sungchul turned towards Elijah.

“Who gave you that book?”

It was a question that had to be asked at one point. Sungchul felt that that moment had been drawing close, and it had finally arrived.

Elijah also knew that Sungchul would ask that question at some point. After organizing his thoughts in his head, he made a complete and calm reply.

“Let me first start by asking for your leniency. My sister and I know very little. It is because she appeared before us without warning. We also don’t know whether the identity this person revealed to us is true or not.”

It was not a satisfactory answer. Sungchul’s arm twitched slightly, but to Elijah, that movement felt unreasonably large. He gulped and continued to speak again.

“She gave the name of one of the Seven Heroes.”

“Seven Heroes?”

Sungchul’s lips that had been tightly shut came loose. Elijah immediately followed up the question.

“Yes. The woman called herself Vestiare.”

Vestiare. One of the Seven Heroes, and the one who had handed Sungchul his Echo Mage class. Sungchul's hand shot up. It was a signal for silence. He then turned to look at Sophia. Sophia's figure trembled slightly, but her dignified eyes met Sungchul's.

“Have you also seen this woman?”

Sophia combed through her memories at his question.

“It was a blonde High Elf.”

Sungchul's eyes lit up.

“She had pale skin like a ghost. Enough to be able to see her veins. She also had a serene voice as though she was from a dream.”

Sophia's recollection of Vestiare roughly matched up with his. It didn't seem like a lie. Sungchul immediately fell into thought.

‘The Calamity of the Devil King hasn't ended, but the Seven Heroes are already active?’

The words of the Breggas siblings couldn't be trusted 100%, but most of what they said seemed to be truthful. Sungchul looked toward the towers of Devil worshippers with suspicion.

‘There is no denying that something is going on below the surface.’

He quickly concluded his thoughts.

Now, a firmly shut door stood before them. It was a massive steel door that didn’t look like it could be forced open with human strength. But it opened with a thunderous noise once Sungchul’s hand, instilled with godly strength, took action.

“Follow me.”

Sungchul stepped into the tower leaking with overflowing ominous light.

Chapter 87 – Lords Of The Tower (1)

Within the tower, a short path appeared with opaque windows on either side. It was an empty walkway, but ceaseless whispers could be heard from every direction. There stood another door on the opposite end of the path. Sungchul flung that door open.

As soon as the door opened, an overwhelming stench of perfume that could paralyze the senses flooded his nose. Sungchul held his breath and looked around at the surroundings. He had arrived at a crossroads this time. Every path contained windowed walls similar to the previous path in each cardinal direction. The previous whispers that blanketed the air like a fog were now clear enough to be discerned.

“Hey, Good-lookin’ Oppa. Come and play.”

“Ten gold coins. Anything below ten gold coins could be worked out too!”

“It’s the same no matter where you go, so just come into our shop!”

It was a commotion that was commonly heard in any marketplace. Elijah’s face remained unchanged, but Sophia revealed her tension. Sungchul’s indifferent face looked towards the wall where the noises came from. Behind the cloudy window, there was a shadowy figure in the shape of a human whose eyes lit up in a reddish hue.

“Where’s the Altar of Ten Thousand Demons?”

Sungchul finally asked Elijah. Elijah opened the book and nodded as he arrived at the answer.

“At the top of the tower.”

“Typical.”

Sungchul pressed forward.

As he walked a few more steps, a scantily clad woman with a mask whose clothing barely covered only the most important parts appeared.

“Oh, my. How cute. It looks like we have a couple of new faces here.”

Sophia who noticed the woman’s vulgar appearance paled.

“Orabuni! you can’t look!”

She hurriedly rushed towards Elijah and covered his eyes. Sungchul, on the other hand, looked at the new woman with particular interest.

‘Something that is not a devil nor a human.’

The feet of the masked woman didn't touch the floor. She appeared to float like a balloon through some magical force.

“State your purpose.”

Sungchul demanded plainly. The woman's rosy lips formed a curious smile beneath her mask.

“Oh, my. A young man that doesn't even bat an eye at the sight of me? Maybe I'm not your type?”

“I said state your purpose.”

A hint of annoyance mixed in Sungchul's voice. The woman licked her lips in disappointment at Sungchul's cold response and straightened her body once again.

“I don't have any particular purpose. I just wanted to be the first to greet the new faces.”

Then her eyes settled on Elijah. Elijah, whose eyes were still covered by Sophia's hands, had the Tome of the High Devil in his embrace. The woman's eyes revealed a strange light when she saw the book.

“My my. You've got the book.”

The voice of the masked woman changed.

“Hey, Good looking Oppa. That book... could I have a look?”

She drifted towards Elijah’s direction and pushed her body towards him.

“Be gone! Perverse harlot!”

Sophia drew her blade in repulsion. When she did so, the woman retreated with a mischievous smile on her face.

“My my. A baby just weaned off of milk is trying to interfere? Do you want to die?”

She flew back but quickly raised both of her manicured hands. As she did so, Walls of flame formed around Sungchul. The woman’s coy voice could be heard beyond the flames.

“Hand over the book if you wish to preserve your life. Otherwise, you can burn with the book.”

At that very moment, Sungchul jumped into the flames. He burst through the flames in an instant and stormed towards the masked woman standing behind it. The masked woman tried to recite another spell in the face of such unexpected behavior, but Sungchul’s hand was faster. His hand gripped her neck.

“Kk-kuuu....”

Her arms and legs supple with beautiful youth began to flail. When Sungchul began to assert a bit more strength, the woman’s appearance started to change. Sungchul firmly asked his question without releasing his grip.

“Who are you?”

“I-I am...! Cough! Cough! A resident... of this tower!”

“Why do you covet the book?”

“I-I can become... a real De... Devil with it...!!”

“I see. This is the final question. Where is this place?”

The masked woman answered Sungchul through great pain.

“This is... the Tower of Euphoria... It is the territory of the High Devil Miriadora...!”

Sungchul’s interrogation ended here. He threw the masked woman towards a wall. Her body broke through one of the opaque windows and dispersed the shadowy figure behind it before she turned into smoke herself. A massive maggot with the head of a human wriggled in her place when the smoke dissipated. It was a disgusting lifeform that conjured repulsion at the mere sight of it.

“It looks like this was the true form of that harlot.”

Sophia held her blade as she headed towards the direction of the wall. Fearsome hostility poured out of her eyes. Sungchul held her back.

“Leave it. Life itself is a punishment for their kind.”

There were many different forms of immortality. The ideal form of immortality was to live eternally while retaining their original appearance, but that was a special privilege available only to beings who were naturally immortal. An inferior being, therefore, had no choice but to resort to repulsive and wretched dark magic which often resulted in grotesque and freakish appearance. Sungchul immediately understood that this maggot-like creature was one such pitiful result of their experiments with immortality.

When he gained some more distance from the paths filled with opaque windows, he was able to see more residents of this tower. They each had overwhelmingly charismatic appearances. They were either handsome youths or voluptuous women, and they all attempted to entice Sungchul’s party.

“Hey, miss. Do you want to play with me? We can just swap stories for a bit?”

“Little boy with the red book. You’re totally my type! Do you want to have a meal together? Or maybe something else...?”

When Sungchul's group ignored them completely and pushed on, the crowd of beauties and handsome men continued their vulgar jokes and suggestive tirade. A set of stairs heading upwards could be seen as the group moved forward.

A space filled with the sensuous aroma of food appeared as the group entered the next floor. Sounds of wine glasses clinking, food being chewed, and meat being grilled could be heard behind each opaque window. There were chefs holding ladles and wearing comically tall chef hats.

“Now now! You'll be missing out if you don't have a taste! These are the greatest delicacies that can't be found anywhere in the human world!”

“Hey, there is a single empty table just waiting for you! It'll be perfect if you guys come over here!”

All the people here were fighting to attract Sungchul's group towards their shop. Sophia, who had a completely hostile attitude towards the masked pervert, now appeared to have lowered her guard. More than anything, the Breggas siblings hadn't had a decent meal since they entered the Demon Realm.

‘Grrrrwl...’

Their tension began to wear down as the tempting aroma of food enticed them in their already hungry state.

“Let’s go and have a little taste.”

Sungchul pointed towards the barbecue of an entire baby pig on a spinning rotisserie.

“Sounds great!”

The chef with a comically tall hat of about 2 meters laughed as he held out a leg of the baby pig. Sungchul inserted the food into his mouth with a serious expression.

‘Gulp.’

The Breggas siblings could only swallow their drool, but Sungchul’s face was not pleasant.

[The Score of this dish is.... 0 points.]

[It might not be a good idea to put another dish of this caliber before me unless you intend to insult me.]

The abysmal score and the threatening message that appeared before him weren’t the only problems. As expected, there was a serious conundrum behind this dish.

‘This is human meat. They also flavored it with sorcery and narcotics.’

Sungchul immediately spat out the meat from his mouth.

“Hey! You dare spit out my top dish made with my heart and soul?! You lowly peasant with no discerning taste!”

The chef roared in anger and pulled out something from his possession. It was a large kitchen knife caked with blood and dried maggots.

“I’ll cook you up!”

“ ... ”

Sungchul easily evaded the knife of the rushing chef and held his collar before shoving his face onto the spinning grill.

‘Chiiiiiii-’

The chef began to struggle along with the sound of burning flesh and his tortured scream, but Sungchul’s powerful grip did not allow for the chef to escape.

“Kwaaaaa!!”

The Breggas siblings watched on as the chef let out a howling scream and turned into a grotesque maggot. The mouth-watering baby pig on the rotisserie also transformed into a human thigh before their eyes.

“Claiming to be a chef after declaring such garbage as a ‘dish’... Your arrogance knows no bounds.”

Sungchul threw the maggot chef onto a wall and let something peek out from beneath his coat. The chef discovered the brilliant light of the golden broach underneath. The other chefs that had been spectating the scene were blinded by the sight of it.

“Oh....!!”

“Is that the symbol of a High-Grade Chef?!”

“It’s real...! A real one has appeared!!”

The other chefs on the floor immediately recognized the broach with a single glance, unlike the Breggas siblings. They looked at Sungchul as though they were looking at some monster and continued pouring out praises.

“You must be feeling good. Real~ good.”

Bertelgia bluntly spoke her feelings which Sungchul completely ignored as he said in a firm voice,

“Let’s go.”

Following this floor, several different areas appeared. There were some floors filled with comfortable beds, and Sungchul’s group could see people lying on the beds with euphoric smiles on their faces. It was a space that made one’s eyelids heavy.

Another floor was filled with people on racks being whipped and tortured through various instruments. The atmosphere felt like both the torturer and the tortured were enjoying their roles.

The final floor was one giant gambling hall. It was filled with men and women of unparalleled beauty boasting about their appearances, but on closer inspection, every one of them was missing parts of their body or face. Sungchul could see the reason why as he crossed through the floor. It was because they would gamble their body parts to win over the coveted parts of others. There was no other form of currency that would instill these immortal maggots with a similar thrill of gambling such as this.

‘Is this the world sought so dearly by these Devil Worshipers?.’

At the very least, the faces of those reflected in Sungchul’s eyes looked happy. It wasn’t discernible whether all of this was a facade, but it also wasn’t Sungchul’s place to discern it.

“It looks like the Altar is beyond this door.”

The final set of stairs awaited Sungchul, and when he climbed it, a massive space opened up before him. There was something similar to a gigantic blob of flesh occupying the space.

“Hm? That is...?!”

Sungchul looked at the massive piece of meat with disinterest. There was a faint trace of what appeared to be a face on this grotesquely swinging piece of meat.

“Welcome, guests. I don’t think I’ve met any of you before?”

The slab of meat spoke in a soft voice. It was a low voice, but it held enough weight to fill the surroundings.

“I am the owner of this tower. I am Miriadora.”

The eyes embedded into the flesh of this meat discovered the red book in Elijah’s grasp.

“So you’ve brought the book. If you understood the hidden meaning buried within the book and still wish to undertake it, open the book before me.”

The Altar of Ten Thousand Demons that the book was referring to was this massive slab of meat that looked to weigh dozens of tons.

“I will warn you before you open the book before me. My quest does not reward like other quests and will give you more than an ordinary compensation, and by that, I mean the punishment for failure will be proportionate to the rewards.”

The massive blob shook as his arms moved to raise his stomach folds. A single maggot with a human head was revealed to be pressed within the folds of his stomach. The maggot worked hard to crawl out of the folds of the stomach after which he smiled toward Sungchul’s party.

“The Tome of the High Devils that you’ve brought is the entrance ticket to receive this quest! You all will have a single attempt at this opportunity, and for additional attempts, you’ll have to bring another Tome of the High Devils here again.”

The maggot blabbed on excitedly. Sungchul silently focused on the maggot’s explanation.

“Lord Miriadora has a total of 10 quests, and one of them is a mission. Upon completion of the mission, you all will receive the privilege to become a High Devil like Lord Miriadora. This does not mean that the other quests can be overlooked! The authority within the tower will vary depending on how much of the 10 quests you are able to complete!”

The maggot then began to laugh hysterically while rolling on the floor for some mysterious reason. Sungchul brought up a question.

“What happens if none of the quests are completed?”

The maggot formed an eerie smile as he answered.

“You’ll be turned into livestock without even achieving immortality.”

“...”

“However, do not fret! You’ll earn the privilege to become a resident of the Tower of Euphoria upon the completion of even a single quest!”

Sungchul had another question.

“Will we receive the quests together?”

The maggot nodded his head.

“It’s fine if you want to do it together. If you’re ok with having the others turned into livestock that is.”

As he heard this, he couldn’t help but think.

‘It has been a while since I did a quest as a group.’

They weren’t really reliable companions, but he turned toward Elijah and spoke in a composed voice.

“Open the book.”

Chapter 88 – Lords Of The Tower (2)

When the book was opened, glittering letters appeared before Sungchul's party.

[Path to Euphoria #1]

Requirement – Exterminate the residents of the Tower of Idiocy. / Reward – Strength 5, Magic Power 5, Citizenship (Tower of Euphoria), Additional Reward can be chosen.

As the group read through the message, the maggot beside Miriadora began to squirm as he shouted.

“The Tower of Idiocy is the blue tower standing directly next to the Tower of Euphoria. There is a path directly from the Floor of Sloth, but I recommend you enter from the first floor! There are a lot of powerful Guardians overlooking the entrance on the fourth floor, you know?”

Sungchul's group started by retracing their path back down. The group passed through the floors filled with avarice and corruption before the desolation of the Demon Realm greeted them as they exited the tower. They had simply crossed through a single steel door, but it felt like a whole different world.

“...Are you perhaps trying to become a High Devil as well?”

Elijah mustered up the courage to finally ask the question that was burning in his mind as he gazed at Sungchul's back.

Sungchul immediately shot back with a reply.

"I don't intend to become one of those garbage existences."

"But then why...?"

"I only need magic power."

"Magic?!"

Curiosity rose in Elijah and Sophia's eyes.

'Why would such a powerful man require magic?'

Sungchul lifted his head to scan the blue tower standing next to the Tower of Euphoria.

'I better finish this quickly.'

Sungchul turned his head slightly before asking a question.

"I remember something about an additional reward. Do you

know of its requirements?”

Elijah shuffled through the Tome of the High Devils and calmly replied to Sungchul’s question.

“It looks like you’ll receive the additional reward upon the death of 10 or more residents of the tower or the death of a Supervisor.”

“A Supervisor...”

The entrance to the blue tower was locked tight similar to the Tower of Euphoria, but a faint bit of cold light peeked through between the doors. Sungchul stood before the doors and flung them open. A neatly decorated white and faint blue interior greeted him. The tower had a completely different atmosphere to that of the Tower of Euphoria.

Sungchul opened another door that stood in his path and a wide hallway filled with countless pillars appeared. Stillness that reminded them of death oozed throughout the hallway. Despite the sheer size of the open hall, not a single shadow of a person nor their movements could be seen. It felt like a space frozen in time.

Sungchul cautiously entered the hall and began to look around for the residents of this tower that were bound to be somewhere close by. It didn’t take long for something to capture his attention. A single motionless man sat on a square stone chair next to a pillar.

Sungchul and his group drew closer. Their footsteps were loud

enough to echo throughout the entire hall, and soon Sungchul could see the resident of this tower up close. It was a man that had a beautiful appearance and an imposing presence similar to the residents of the previous tower. The only difference between the inhabitants of the two towers was that the man of this tower was lost in deep contemplation.

Sungchul stood before him and addressed him.

“Hey.”

The man’s eyes narrowed as he lifted his head at Sungchul’s calling.

“You all look to be new here, but it is against the rules to speak within the Pallid Hall.”

He appeared disgusted as though he had witnessed something that he would have rather avoided before rising from his seat to leave. Sungchul did not lay a hand on the man.

‘Something is off.’

Sungchul lifted his head to survey his surroundings. He could see that there were people spread sporadically in the hall. They were dressed in the same blue and white colors of the hall and sat motionlessly, like inanimate objects. They were all sitting on a chair deep in contemplation without any way of knowing what they were thinking so deeply about.

Sungchul prodded another for conversation but was given the same response as the first. He was told multiple times that speaking is forbidden or that it was against the rules.

“What should we do now?”

Elijah asked in a quiet voice. At this point, Sungchul began to pull out the Demonic Weapon Cassandra from his Soul Storage. He abruptly pulled out the whip and began to strike the marble floor of the hall fiercely.

Shrrack!

The sharp noises reverberated through the entire hall. The residents who were contemplating in their chairs began to turn towards Sungchul. All of them looked at him with scorn and repulsion, but not a single one of them moved to restrict him. Sungchul continued to strike the floor.

Several marble tiles became shattered, sending fragments into the air, with each strike that Sungchul’s whip made across the floor. The continuous chain of bone-chilling sounds of impact filled the Hall.

‘Just why is he doing this?’

Elijah and Sophia Breggas simply stared at this scene with dumbstruck faces, but it didn’t take long before Sophia caught

something in the corner of her eyes. Three large and dark beings approached the opposite end of the hall.

‘What are those?’

Sophia’s eyes grew wide. The huge dark figures turned out to be human. The mere body size of these figures reached three meters, and they had an impressive physique to suit it. They were wearing the mask of an executioner over their heads while inexplicably holding a rope for hangings and a steel rake. Their breathing was heavy enough to be heard across the other side of the hall.

“Who goes there? Who dares to breach the rules?”

Bloodshot eyes flared intensely through the holes on the black masks.

“It must be YOU!”

Sungchul finally stopped whipping as they appeared and took a look at them in turn.

“....”

The giant holding the steel rake pointed the rake towards Sungchul and began to shout.

“I hold immediate judgement for the crime of those that violate

the laws of the holy and solemn Tower of Order!”

As the Giant shouted, the other two Giants began to surround Sungchul’s group. The Breggas siblings pulled out their weapons as the situation began to deteriorate, but on the other hand, Sungchul continued to glare at the Giants simply without any other particular movements. Soon, the Giant in the center pointed towards Sungchul and shouted his sentence.

“The sentence is... Death!”

The three Giants threw out their hangman’s noose at the same time. Each of them was aimed accurately at Sungchul’s neck, but before the noose managed to catch his neck, Cassandra tangled all three of the nooses with one sharp movement.

“You bastard!”

The Giants roared in anger as they pulled at their hangman’s noose. They each pulled on their rope with strength befitting their massive stature, but the whip and the man holding the whip didn’t budge. When terror filled the bloodshot eyes hidden behind the masks, Sungchul lightly moved his arm. The Giants were flying in the air within the next moment. Sungchul’s god-like strength had lifted them into the air, but it didn’t end there. After lifting the Giants, he pulled his whip taut to cause them to slam onto the ground with full force.

Boom!

The ground was struck with a tremendous force that caused the entire tower to tremble. It goes without saying that the fallen Giants did not move any further.

But what was most unusual was the reaction of the residents. They had witnessed an incredible scene unfolding before them, but the residents of the towers didn't show any sign of moving from their seats and simply looked onwards.

‘As expected. This is a strange place.’

Sungchul looked at the message that appeared before him with disinterest.

[Exemplary. You have gone beyond simply killing the dumb residents of the Blue Tower, and managed to take out their guard dogs.]

[Accordingly, you have been deemed worthy of S-grade rewards.]

Basic Rewards:

Strength: 5

Magic Power: 5

Citizenship (Tower of Euphoria)

Selective Rewards:

Certificate for Doctor Madd's Plastic Surgery

Certificate for Doctor Psykko's Gender Change

Meal Voucher for Chef Minamoto's restaurant

“ ... ”

The optional rewards were all complete garbage, and he couldn't even receive one of the basic rewards.

[Your strength is exceedingly high, and thus a portion of the basic rewards cannot be received.]

All he managed to receive was 5 magic power and a citizenship with unknown purpose. Sungchul opted to choose none of the rewards, but Doctor Madd's certificate for plastic surgery was automatically given to him. On the other hand, the Breggas siblings seemed to have chosen the meal Voucher for Chef Minamoto's restaurant.

Thud.

A red identity tag dropped by Sungchul's feet. It appeared to be the citizenship in question. Sungchul held the tag and carefully

studied it.

[Citizenship (Tower of Euphoria)]

Grade: Common – Mid grade

Type: Held Item

Effects: None

Note: It is possible to receive an eternal body when holding the citizenship before the Altar of Ten Thousand Demons. However, it must be noted that the current body is offered as a sacrifice and cannot be recovered.

‘It looks like a ticket to turn into those maggots.’

Sungchul didn’t hesitate to throw the citizenship to the ground and crush it with his military boots.

“Excuse me. I have something to tell you.”

Elijah carefully opened his mouth to speak. Sungchul turned slightly to respond.

“Speak.”

“The second quest has been revealed in the book.”

Elijah opened the Tome of the High Devil in front of Sungchul. Another message appeared before Sungchul's eyes.

[The Path to Euphoria #2]

Proof – Break one of the scales that can be found anywhere on the second floor. / Reward – Magic Resistance 10, Intuition 10, Standard Body, Additional Reward can be chosen.

Everything that he had seen so far seemed to add up to what Sungchul was already thinking.

‘This quest. There is something more to this.’

It wasn't explicitly written anywhere, but Sungchul discovered that the Tower of Euphoria, the tower he first stepped into, had a hostile relationship to the blue tower where he currently stood. More than anything, it was strongly implied within the contents of the quest itself.

‘Let's just go along with it for now.’

Sungchul continued towards the second floor with this line of thinking.

The second floor of the blue tower was a space filled entirely of pure white. The walls, the floors, the ceilings, and even the

decorations attached to each surface was entirely white. Sungchul who felt his eyes beginning to strain pulled something from his Soul Storage. An item brought over from the Modern World. It was an old and faded pair of sunglasses.

Bertelgia saw the item and shook her body to ask a question.

“What’s with the colored glasses?”

“It’s an item called sunglasses.”

It was an item given by an old friend that had become a Returnee. He had said that he was a bus driver with 20 years of experience without a single accident on his record before he was brought over to the Other World. He had a problem with his temper, but more importantly, he had been rather kind-hearted and dependable. Sungchul continued to walk forward while reminiscing about his old friend.

A door appeared not before long.

When he entered through the door, a large space similar to a courtroom appeared. In this courtroom, there were Giants lined up along the judge’s stand whose end could only be seen through straining your neck, and there was a haggard human sitting on a plain chair beneath them. The judges looked down at the accused with magnanimous expressions and spoke

“According to article number 284 of Sharique Law... the accused

is sentenced to be executed.”

Right as the words were uttered, giant executioners grabbed the haggard person by the collar and began to swing him above their heads. The accused that was being spun around like a tied balloon and lost consciousness before reverting to his maggot form. The executioners hooked the maggot onto their steel rake and disappeared somewhere.

Soon, another accused was sitting on the plain chair. The judges spoke again in their magnanimous voice again

“According to article 53 of Sharique Law... the accused is sentenced to be executed.”

The same scene as before began to replay itself. The executioners grabbed the accused by the collar, then they hooked the dead maggot onto their steel rake and disappeared somewhere.

‘The Tower of Euphoria was a gathering place for all sorts of crazies, but this place also seems to be on a similar level.’

Sungchul who was observing the court sessions discovered an object shining in a golden light on top of the judge’s stand. It was a pair of scales. Sungchul suddenly held a hammer in his grip. He addressed the judge’s stand that was high up in the air.

“According to Article 1 of Sungchul’s Law... I’m going to break everything here.”

Chapter 89 – Lords Of The Tower (3)

Sungchul's hammer swung towards the Judges' stand.

‘Boom!’

The stand was smashed to pieces following a powerful sonic boom. The judges sitting on the stand fell onto the floor along with a shower of splinters.

“Get that bastard!”

The executioners swung their snare as they rushed towards Sungchul, but they just weren't able to keep up with him.

‘Bam! Bam! Bam!’

With every refreshing sound of impact, an executioner slumped towards the ground like a frog struck by lightning as their heads were smashed to pieces. The slaughter didn't last much longer, and the entire courtroom was completely suppressed after a single minute.

A dense Book of Laws that had fallen beside Sungchul's feet was opened up to the middle. The pages were filled to the brim with articles on law written in tiny letters, and Sungchul chose a few of them to read.

[Section 234 Those that aren't sincere in their contemplation will be put to death.]

[Section 235 Those that aren't performing compulsory labor for the Tower will be put to death.]

[Section 236 Those that graffiti the walls will be put to death.]

There were countless references to questionable crimes listed within the Book of Laws, and every punishment was death without exception. There were no classification, no standard, nor any fundamental basis.

Sungchul gazed towards a judge that was groaning on the floor.

“Krrrrrr....”

There was no trace of that matchless magnanimous expression on his face which now resembled that of a man who had fallen from grace. The scale was lying on the floor before the judge. Sungchul stood in front of the scale before turning around for a question.

“What was the requirement for the optional reward?”

Elijah frantically scoured through the book upon Sungchul's question and made his reply.

“It’s to kill a judge.”

“I see.”

Sungchul’s hammer rose towards the sky. It was then when the judge began to shout with a pitiful voice.

“Mercy!”

“ ... ”

Sungchul granted as much mercy as they did towards their accused. spurts of blood spilled on his military boots, and Sungchul checked the messages that appeared before him.

[Amazing! You have taken care of the repulsive pigs while smashing the idiots’ annoying symbol of justice.]

[You have been deemed worthy of S-grade rewards.]

- Basic Reward:
- Magic Resistance 10
- Intuition 10

Basic Flesh Ticket x1

Selective Reward:

Ticket for Heaven Service from the Peerless Beauty, Su

Ticket for Fantastic Service from Peerless Host, Pu

Coin for Crimson Dragon Gambling Den x100 Gil

“ ... ”

The optional rewards for this quest were garbage as well. Sungchul questioned if there was any value in picking any of the optional rewards at all. But he chose to pick one this time instead of letting it default. He picked the third reward, the coins for the gambling den; It seemed more useful than the worthless service tickets.

The Basic Flesh Ticket appeared to be redeemable certificates which allowed the residents to hide their original maggot forms behind a beautiful facade. As he wasn't a human maggot that lived within these towers, Sungchul had no use for the it.

“What's the next quest?”

Sungchul asked as he grabbed the bluish coins that had fallen to the floor.

Elijah appeared to have gotten used to the pace of things and had an answer prepared before Sungchul asked his question. He revealed a new page to Sungchul.

[Path to Euphoria #3]

Proof – Tear or burn down the collection of 20 books located on the third floor of the tower of idiots. / Reward – Intuition 10, Magic Power – 10, High Achiever's Citizenship (Tower of Euphoria), Additional Rewards available]

Sungchul nodded his head in acknowledgement.

‘As expected. This quest as well. It's a struggle between factions.’

If Sungchul was accurate in his guess, this blue tower would also have another High Devil at the top floor similar to the tower with the High Devil Miriadora as a fight could only happen when both parties were on equal footing. Sungchul's group continued on to the third floor.

Like the Tower of Euphoria which was filled with different sorts of mental patients on each floor, this tower of idiots, or rather the Tower of Order, had different monsters displaying different sorts of eccentricities. The Tower of Euphoria was filled with people indulging in their desires, but the Tower of Order encouraged sophistication through restraint, intellectualism, and cultivation of skills.

Sungchul took a different approach and began to complete the quest in quick succession. He burned away the books as soon as he saw the library where they were kept and even killed the librarian with a single blow from Fal Garaz for the optional rewards. When he finished the sixth quest, only the final mission was left for Sungchul's party.

[Path to Euphoria #Final]

Kill Karak Sharique, the King of Idiots.

Rewards – Strength 30, Vitality 30, Dexterity 30, Skull of Modification (Epic)

Sungchul looked at the tome that Elijah held for him with indifference.

“....”

The rewards weren't all that enticing, especially the stat gains that were completely useless. Sungchul wasn't sure what the Skull of Modification was, but it didn't look like something he should care about.

“What do you plan on doing now?”

Elijah carefully asked Sungchul. Sungchul began to climb the stairs to the final floor in response.

“We go to meet the owner of this tower.”

The final floor was a massive parliament. There were countless judges and executioners sitting in their designated seats, and there was a gigantic devil with the face of a fly in a similarly large seat of power in the center.

“I welcome you to this place, intruder.”

The High Devil opened both his arms in greeting as he spoke. There were countless maggots squirming below his throne, and they were squirming to eat the skin flakes that fell off his body.

Sungchul took off his sunglasses, slung Fal Garaz onto his shoulder, and moved forward. Elijah felt his heart beating with excitement.

‘My God... so something like this could also happen. I thought we’d just die without resistance when we met with the Enemy of the World... Instead, I managed to get amazing boosts to my stats and an opportunity to become a High Devil thanks to him...’

The might and boldness of the Enemy of the World were unmatched. His own father, Martin Breggas, could not compare. The Enemy of the World was more powerful and oppressive than the rumors suggested, and he was truly an existence that couldn’t

be opposed. It now made sense to him why every nation feared him so, and now that very person was standing before the leader of the Tower of Order. Elijah expected for Sungchul to fight the High Devil with the legendary Fal Garaz. It wasn't clear to him who would win, but Elijah would jump in and help Sungchul for the sake of victory.

However, Sungchul stood before the massive fly king and didn't show any further movement, instead, he looked up and spoke to the High Devil.

“Do you know who I am?”

The master of the Tower of Order, Karak Sharique, shook his head.

“I do not know of you, intruder.”

Sungchul held up his hammer. But this object of fear of all devils within the Demon Realm did not seem to interest this High Devil at all. Instead, the devil clucked with laughter and simply spoke his mind.

“Regardless of who you are, you must have some skill for a human to get this far. Are you a Warchief of a country? Or perhaps the holder of the Hero title?”

It looked as though this devil had no clue who Sungchul was. Sungchul finally asked another question.

“You. Not very close to the other Devils, are you?”

“Of course I couldn’t get close. I might have become a High Devil, but I was formerly a human. Devils are quite the bigoted race despite their appearance.”

“I see.”

This explained why this High Devil did not fear Sungchul. The Devil Worshipers that lived beyond the Fog Sea had formed their own area, secluded from the rest of the world.

‘Why are they talking so much? Can’t he just kill him already?’

As Sungchul and the High Devil’s conversation prattled on, Elijah began to feel restless. He wanted Sungchul to immediately exterminate the High Devil and complete the mission, but not everything always went as planned. Sungchul put the hammer into his Soul Storage. It meant that he had no intention to fight.

A shallow sigh leaked out from Elijah’s lips. Sophia simply continued to protect this restless boy’s rear.

“Do you perhaps know why I’ve come here?”

Sungchul asked the High Devil. Karak haughtily nodded his head.

“Were you sent by the owner of that animal pen? It appears that the book held by that human behind you is his.”

“Then, do you have a book as well?”

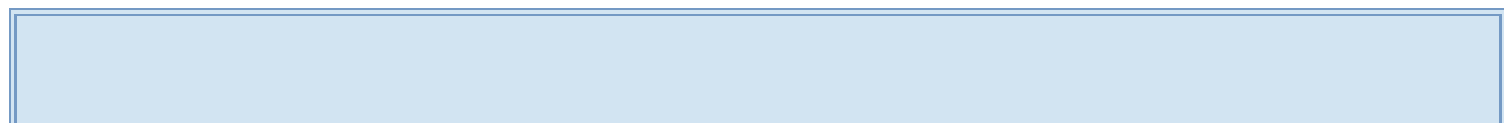
Sungchul’s eyes lit up.

“A book?”

“That’s right. I’m asking if there is a Tome of High Devils that you’ve created.”

The tome held by Elijah had the designation of being the seventh volume. Sungchul hadn’t been able to figure out what that meant when he first noticed it, but he pieced together the obvious conclusion about the significance of this number as he continued the petty quests and met the people working for the High Devils. He speculated that it meant that there were several volumes of the Tome of High Devils, with each written by the High Devils that lived at the top of the eight towers.

The devil with a fly’s head began to cluck with laughter and pointed his razor sharp fingernail towards Sungchul. A magic formation formed at the tip of this fingernail which caused the book wrapped with blue leather to appear. It then floated towards Sungchul and landed in his hands. Sungchul stared piercingly at this new book.



[Tome of the High Devils: Volume 3]

Grade: Epic

Type: Equipment – Book

Effect: Dexterity 20, Intuition 20 upon equip

Note: Those who wish to obtain the power of the High Devil must open the tome before The Altar of Ten Thousand Demons.

Restriction: Magician Related Class

His suspicions were confirmed. The stats raised were different, but the capabilities matched with the red book held by Elijah Breggas.

“What an unpredictable one. To offer to complete my quests while in the midst of performing the quests of another High Devil.”

It wasn't clear what was so funny, but the High Devil could not stop laughing. As he laughed, the countless executioners and judges mechanically laughed along. The chilling sounds of their laughter swept through the entire room.

Elijah felt extreme fear seeping in his mind. The realization that the goal he desired had been lost had left him in a desperate state already, but this unnerving laughter had driven him past his limits. He was now on the floor clutching the sides of his head. Sophia whose will was comparatively intact approached Elijah with concern on her face.

“Brother.”

It was then that a blue book flew towards her. Sungchul had thrown it at her. She managed to catch the book out of reflex and then glared at Sungchul with a hint of resentment. Sungchul simply looked at her with his usual disinterest and commanded her with a single sentence.

“Open the book.”

“....”

It didn't sit well with her, but she couldn't refuse him. She let out a sigh before opening the book in front of the Altar of Ten Thousand Demons. A faint smile rose on Sungchul's face as another quest message appeared before his eyes.

‘This coven of devil worshippers. It might be another gold mine after the Summoning Palace.’

Sungchul had come to this place with low expectations. But despite the slim chance for gains, the result was better than he could have ever imagined. The key to rapid growth that he had been searching for was hidden here all along.

‘I'm not sure how many High Devils reside in this region, but I hope that all of them hate each other.’

Sungchul smiled to himself as the group descended the stairs of the blue tower. He decided to drain this place of every opportunity before leaving.

An emboldened Sungchul acted without restraint. He performed each quest faithfully as Sophia revealed to him as he entered the Tower of Euphoria once again. He killed the pimp of the first floor, massacred the chefs of the second floor, and smashed every bed on the third floor. Similar scenes of destruction unfolded on every other floor, and Sungchul’s party tucked away bits and pieces of stats offered by the tome of the blue High Devil. Sungchul finally checked his stats as he approached the final set of stairs for the top floor of the Tower of Euphoria.

[Stats]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Vitality 801 Magic Power 388

Intuition 375 Magic Resist 622

His eyes lit up.

‘Looks like I managed to raise Magic Power by a bit more than 30 here.’

However, Sungchul was still very thirsty for more.

Chapter 90 – The Abandoned (1)

The eight towers within the land of the devil worshippers.

At the top of each tower, a human that had managed to evolve into a High Devil reigned. Every tower contained a small world in itself with different colors and personalities decided by the characteristics of the High Devil that ruled over the tower.

Decadence, order, vanity, craftsmanship, etc. Their personalities and their conduct were vastly different, and it was difficult to place them into a single category. Each High Devil had its own nemesis, and they had created the Tome of the High Devils in order to inconvenience their enemies or eliminate them outright (although the chances of the latter were quite slim).

Sungchul planned to get his hands on all eight volumes of the Tome of the High Devils. He had managed to get his hands on four of them in a single day, and he cleared all of the quests except the final mission at the end. Ordinary people easily lost track of time in the Demon Realm where the sun couldn't be seen, but Sungchul had an incredibly meticulous alarm-his stomach.

It was his principle to eat at every appetite. Sungchul who worshipped diligence in everyday life valued proper rest as highly as his growth. He set up camp on top of the hill overlooking the eight towers once he had completed his rounds on the four towers. Of course, the Breggas siblings acted along with him.

‘Crackle Crackle’

The campfire set up by Sungchul spit red ashes as it burned while the siblings sat in silence. Sungchul had disappeared off to somewhere and was yet to return. Sophia was the first to speak in this heavy silence.

“Brother. Are you ok?”

Her eyes were filled with deep concern. They had experienced an unbelievable growth in stats as they traveled with this existence known as the Enemy of the World, but strictly speaking, the siblings did little else but accompany him. A predator was an unpredictable existence by nature. The oppressor could easily be struck with a foul mood and kill them... or demand worse things than that. Wasn't Sungchul a healthy male?

‘It must have been a while since that man had interacted with a female.’

She didn't want to imagine it, but fear was growing in her mind like a poisonous mushroom.

‘What if that man demands my body... what do I do then? In front of my brother... If I were to suffer such actions... I couldn't bear to live with such a body!’

The mind is prone to distractions when the body is relaxed.

“It's ok, Sophia.”

Elijah was struggling with a different issue.

‘The Enemy of the World... what is that man thinking? Why is he forfeiting the opportunity to become a High Devil right at the cusp and only doing these lowly quests?’

The increase in stats was worth celebrating. Elijah had always been told about his great potential as a successor, but he had achieved amazing growth in a single day. However, Elijah had his sights on a much higher goal.

High Devil.

He idolized the strength of Devils that transcended humans, but Sungchul didn’t seem to have any intentions of joining him. He would have to see how things progressed for a bit longer, but it seemed like the man was more interested in the tomes than the High Devils.

‘Crackle Crackle.’

The withered firewood gradually burned through and settled at the bottom. Elijah grabbed a dry branch from the pile beside him and used it to stir the stack of firewood before lapsing into an unintentional silence.

‘If that man doesn’t take care of the High Devils, what should I do then? Do I have to face the High Devils on my own?’

However, he didn't have the confidence to do so. The High Devils that he had seen personally were overwhelmingly oppressive, and he saw no path to victory. His struggle grew deeper within the silence. Soon, footsteps could be heard from nearby.

‘Crunch’

The sound of military boots that was now so familiar. Sungchul was approaching. He was carrying something large on his back.

‘Thud.’

He placed the object on the ground. It was some form of a cow with long feathers. The creature looked young, but its size was quite impressive.

Sungchul pulled out a blade and began to butcher the cow without a word.

“Are you... preparing to cook that thing?”

Sophia carefully asked a question.

“...”

Sungchul looked back at her with sharp eyes as he nodded.

“If it’s food, how about we consider eating over at the Tower of Euphoria? I have a meal ticket from a quest.”

Sophia held out the meal ticket to Chef Minamoto’s that she received as an additional reward.

“Do you see a farm anywhere?” asked Sungchul.

This simple question caused Sophia to look around her surroundings carefully. Forget a farm, she couldn’t see any sign of a single field anywhere. She shook her head helplessly.

“Where do you think the ingredients to feed those huge number of people comes from? If you still want to eat over there despite this knowledge, I won’t stop you.”

Sungchul continued to prepare the meal. The Breggas siblings looked over at Sungchul with complicated emotions. Sophia’s eyes were filled with admiration.

‘Even his swordsmanship isn’t average.’

She practiced both sword and magic, but as her knowledge of the sword was greater than her actual skill, she could clearly see how proficient Sungchul was with his blade. There were no excess movements in his handling of the blade. A significant portion of the cow’s carcass was removed with each movement of his sword, and it was completely dismantled in perfect order.

Sungchul grabbed a portion of the cut meat as the blood dripped off and began to sniff it.

“Mmm... the meat isn’t very good.”

It was quite savory, but there was a slight smell and was also a bit tough to chew. Sungchul grabbed a flat rock from his surrounding and started to mince the meat on top of it with a knife. As he began to chop at a rapid pace, Bertelgia who was inside his pocket became a hindrance to his movement.

“Come out.”

Sungchul pulled her out.

“No! I hate being seen by some strange kids!”

Bertelgia struggled to stay in his pocket, but she couldn’t overcome Sungchul’s strength. She was eventually pulled out, and she began to flap herself into the air. Elijah and Sophia looked towards Bertelgia with surprise.

“A living book?”

Sophia asked as she stared with eyes dimmed by curiosity.

“This your first time seeing a living book?”

Bertelgia, whose mood was soured, shot back sharply. On the other hand, Sungchul pulled out a secret ingredient from his Soul Storage. The cooking container with dried mushrooms, vegetables, pepper, and various herbs appeared before him. Sungchul mixed the ingredients from the container with the minced meat and continued chopping with his knife.

Elijah turned his gaze towards Sungchul's direction. Elijah, who had been sighing relentlessly, grew visibly brighter as he noticed Sungchul cooking. He hadn't had a proper meal in a while and recalled his previous experience with Sungchul's food; unknowingly he began to look forward to the result.

‘Che...!’

Sophia who was watching this scene rose from her seat and approached Sungchul from behind.

“Um...”

“What is it?”

“Could I... help you?”

Sophia had made a once-in-a-lifetime decision before making her request, but Sungchul's response was callous.

“I’ll decline.”

He refused it point-blank.

‘I might as well starve before I leave any of the cooking to you.’

However, Sophia was not one to give up easily. She feared Sungchul, but she stood her ground and asked once more.

“I’ll help just a little bit. Since we are eating as well.”

At this point, Sungchul tore off a portion of the meat he had been mincing and handed it to Sophia.

“Prepare your portion yourself then.”

It was not her ideal resolution, but Sophia received the meat gracefully with both hands and celebrated in her mind.

‘Great. The time has come to show brother my cooking skills!’

Unfortunately, she didn’t notice it. She didn’t notice Elijah’s eyes twitch in fear.

Sophia discerned that the dish Sungchul was preparing was a form of a hamburg steak. The preparation of the ingredients and most of the cooking had already passed through Sungchul’s hands,

and she only had to mince the meat a bit further and grill it.

The mincing wasn't difficult, but the problem was in the grilling. It was difficult to find appropriate cooking tools out here. It took Sophia considerable amount of creativity to prepare an adequate cooking utensil. She noticed a branch rolling on the ground.

‘It'll be fine if I just stick this stick through the meat like a bone and grill the surface, right?’

She looked over her shoulders at Sungchul who she considered her rival. He was still mincing the meat. It was almost a stupid level of persistence. Sophia reminded herself that the greatest spice was hunger and began to put her idea into action.

She washed a branch with an appropriate thickness and stuck the minced meat into its center, but the meat didn't stick properly. It had lost most of its viscosity during the mincing, and it fell apart even when she rolled it into a ball. She had to borrow the power of magic in the end.

Sophia, who had studied the art of Cryomancy, conjured an air of frost from her hand and succeeded in freezing the meat solid onto the stick.

“...That woman. What is she doing?”

Bertelgia who had been kicked out of Sungchul's pocket was wandering the area, and she began to mutter to herself when she

noticed Sophia's antics. Sophia was grilling the frozen meat, as it was, by placing it onto the cooking station attached to the campfire.

Unfortunately, there was no way to properly cook frozen meat.

For a moment, it seemed that the frozen meat was cooking well, but then it suddenly caught fire which turned the entire clump of meat into a piece of coal. A plume of black smoke rose from the fire.

Sophia vaguely recognized that there was something wrong, but didn't completely understand. She pulled out the black mass that was the source of the smoke from the fire, but the branch that had held the meat also suddenly caught fire. She quickly froze the meat, put out the fire, and served the frozen black mass to Elijah.

"Brother, you must have been starving? Eat up. I decided to show off my skills this time around."

"..."

Elijah's face looked relaxed, but his mind wasn't.

'Please... help me. I really don't want to eat... that thing!'

His refusal to deny his sister anything had brought him great pain. His gaze passed over Sophia and landed on Sungchul. Sungchul was throwing a fist-sized rock with a flat surface into the

fire, but as he was doing so, he took a peek over at Elijah and Sophia.

“What’s that? Is that edible?”

Sungchul asked bluntly.

“Of course... it’s edible.”

Sophia showed a bit insulted of displeasure, but Sungchul noticed that Elijah was backed into a corner, so he walked over towards them with a small sigh.

“Why don’t you try eating it? That thing that you’ve made.”

“Eat... it?”

“Just try it. That food you made yourself.”

She would have normally ignored it, but her current opponent was the legendary villain that held the ultimate authority over life and death known as the Enemy of the World.

“It’ll... be delicious?”

Sophia already realized her mistake. She already knew that the food she prepared herself was something that shouldn’t be eaten.

Sungchul quickly lifted the flat stone with the minced meat and carried it closer to the fire. The meat was stacked up like a mountain peak. Sungchul split that meat into three parts and split it equally between himself and the Breggas sibling. Sophia who watched him do so spoke coldly.

“You surely don’t expect us to eat raw meat?”

Sophia may have thrown aside the dish she had prepared, but she still had an excuse left.

‘I burned it because I lacked the proper cooking tools. Could you really do any better?’

At her question, Sungchul’s sword made swift movements. On his blade was placed the small and flat rock that had been previously thrown into the fire. He placed the steaming rock in front of them and using the dagger he placed the minced meat lightly on the rock as if it were butter.

‘Sizzzzle~’

The minced meat miraculously began to cook with a savory sound. The rock that had soaked the campfire’s heat acted like a frying pan. They had no sauce, and only minimal ingredients were used, but the moment that the grilled meat entered their mouths, an extraordinary flavor danced around their tongues.

“Mmm.”

Sungchul, who was the first to enjoy the meat, closed his eyes and savored the flavor.

[The score of the dish is... 68 points!]

It could have earned a higher score with sauce and supplementary ingredients, but this was a score that an ordinary chef could never earn with what was on hand.

“...!!”

A quiet exclamation escaped from Elijah’s lips. The dish had tremendous flavor.

“!!”

Sophia also felt shocked.

‘It was the same meat, but the flavor is this different?!’

She felt frustrated, but she couldn’t stop eating.

Sungchul watched over the Breggas siblings that were

voraciously devouring his meal. He felt his dignity as a chef slowly being recharged. Even if it was a momentary solace.

A familiar scene entered in his mind. It was that of a girl dressed like a vagrant. This child that had abruptly approached him brought up the name of the woman that he had long since forgotten. Sungchul was caught up in conflicting emotions as he watched the girl hungrily eat up the food that a servant brought up. This was in Sungchul's glory days.

It was a time when Sungchul stood at an important crossroads in his life. He, as the 10th Champion of the Continent, was given the position of the newly formed Human Empire's Commander-in-Chief, responsible for bringing order to the continent that had been plagued with corruption and was spiraling out of control.

It was a time when his name was well known throughout the continent.

But on the other hand, it was also the depressing period of time when he was feeling the insidious effects of internal power struggle that spread like an infection from within the empire. He had been quietly preparing to return to the original world along with his comrades, but the appearance of this child completely turned his life around.

“ ... ”

Sungchul's reverie was interrupted by rustling noises in the background.

“Come out.”

A low, but heavy sound left his lips. The Breggas siblings that were completely occupied with eating looked surprised and began to search their surroundings. A dark figure revealed himself to Sungchul’s party through the fog within this heavy silence. They had seen this figure before. It was the human that was lingering around the tower of the devil worshippers doing heavy labor.

The man was wearing black clothes like an undertaker and had his pitiful face covered with a bandana as he carefully walked over to Sungchul and spoke with a hideous voice.

“Kekeke... Don’t misunderstand. I am no enemy. I simply came over with a proposition.”

“A proposition?”

When Sungchul responded with disinterest, a hideous smile formed around the man’s twisted lips underneath his bandana.

“Do you wish to kill the High Devils? If so, I might have some information to share.”

Chapter 91 – The Abandoned (2)

“Get lost.”

Sungchul retorted coldly. The humanoid creature was suppressed by Sungchul’s oppressive aura and backed off without another word. It seemed like the brief meeting with the creature might come to a close without any further development, but this was not the end of it.

“ ... ”

Elijah had stopped eating his meal as he couldn’t take his eyes off the creature. Sungchul had noticed this, but he didn’t mention it.

—

The next day, Sungchul prepared to attack the final four towers. However, just as he was about to depart, Elijah claimed to be suffering from intense pain. Sungchul had expected something like this, but he didn’t quite expect Elijah Breggas, the son of a famous figure, to go as far as to forsake his own dignity. Unfortunately, he made the wrong choice. Sungchul already knew what becoming a Devil truly meant and had seen the end result of such a transformation with his own two eyes, but he also knew that nothing would change even if he said something.

“ ”

He could physically restrain him, but he wasn't obligated to go that far for the boy. Sungchul chose to take the most indirect method for those reasons.

"I need an attendant to hold the book. I don't want to flip through the pages tediously. If you need medication to numb the pain, I can give you some."

When Sungchul said as such, Elijah turned towards Sophia without hesitation.

"Sophia. I'm sorry, but you'll have to go in my stead."

"Brother!"

Sophia was shaken, but she also understood the resolve in Elijah's eyes and nodded weakly.

"Hand over all of the Tomes of the High Devils to the girl."

Sungchul silently moved forward. Elijah obediently handed over every tome that he held to Sophia.

"Don't be concerned for me."

Elijah reassured her as he handed the books over.

He said as such, but there was no way that she wouldn't be worried about him. This may be the territory of the devil worshippers, but it was still within the Demon Realm where demons roamed freely. Sophia looked towards Elijah with eyes full of concern as she thought about what to say, but she was unable to come up with anything at this moment. Soon, Sungchul's stern voice could be heard from the front.

“What's taking so long?”

In the end, Sophia simply lowered her head and moved to follow Sungchul. She turned back as she walked behind Sungchul. However, Elijah was not looking at her.

He was looking towards a nameless tower far in the distance where the humanoid creature worked as a laborer. Sophia continued to look towards Elijah until his figure disappeared from her sight, but Elijah did not look in her direction even once.

“....”

Her heart quivered, but she didn't show weakness. Instead, she bit down on her lower lip and turned to look towards Sungchul's back who had flung open the doors of a new tower.

‘You knew that it would be like this.’

It was a recent change that led to Sophia holding the Breggas name. Elijah and Sophia were from different mothers. In contrast

to Elijah's mother who was the esteemed daughter of an influential family, Sophia's mother was a country bumpkin that lived on a farm scooping cow manure. To Sophia who had lived with the scar of illegitimacy since birth, her childhood was pitiful. It was none other than Elijah who had brought the light of salvation to this little girl. To Sophia, Elijah was more than family. She was prepared to give up anything for her brother, even her meager life.

“...Becoming a Devil...”

The man who was leading her down an unfamiliar hallway finally opened his mouth. Sophia, who had been temporarily preoccupied with her thoughts, snapped to attention and gazed towards the back of the man with the fluttering ragged coat.

“Is essentially the same as throwing oneself away.”

“...?!”

Sophia's eyes grew wide.

‘Why is this person saying such things?’

Sungchul continued to speak.

“The physique of a Devil is different than the physique of a man. If the human body is like the surface of a lake lightly stirring with the wind, then the body of a Devil is like a sea forever burning in the endless flames of compulsion.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t understand what you’re talking about.”

Sophia sincerely asked for clarification, but Sungchul did not stop talking.

“Inside the body of the Devils, the mind of a human won’t last even a year before turning to ash.”

“...”

She already knew that the man was never one to speak empty words; she finally figured out what he was trying to get through to her and quickly regained her cool before turning to Sungchul with frosty words.

“If we don’t get stronger, we’ll die. Martin Breggas. You have no idea how cruel and twisted the man really is.”

“You probably won’t die. If you give up everything, that is.”

Sungchul abruptly stopped walking and turned around. He pointed a finger towards himself.

“Aren’t I still alive?”

“But you’re strong.”

Sophia spoke in protest, but Sungchul only let out a bitter laugh.

“I wasn’t strong from the start. When I first became the Enemy of the World, there were 10 people in the continent who were more powerful than me... no, over 30 including those that are not so well known.”

“....”

Sophia shut her mouth and didn’t speak any further. She knew the kind of manpower that was deployed to deal with Sungchul.

Fighting him required at minimum an Armada. Or perhaps the highest class of Assassins from the Assassin’s guild. It was completely on a different scale from the Breggas siblings who could be taken care of by a few second rate Assassins..

“If you throw away the Breggas name and live in seclusion, Martin Breggas will not pursue you any further.”

Sungchul said it. He had spoken what they all knew. The reason why Martin was seeking to murder his own son and daughter was to allow for the child of the woman he loved to inherit everything.

“...It’s better to die than to live without a name like savages.”

Sophia finally changed her words. Elijah likely felt the same as

well.

“...”

Sungchul closed his mouth once again and proceeded to follow the tower's stairs to the top. He did not utter another word while they climbed the stairs, but when he arrived before the High Devil on the top floor, he spoke.

“Here are the final days of the humans that became Devils. You must have seen it several times already, but this should be adequate evidence.”

What awaited Sungchul's party at the top floor of the green tower was the figure of a giant Devil with iron nails embedded all over his body causing blood and pus to pour from the innumerable wounds. Sophia almost fainted because of the Devil's ghoulish appearance and its even more disgusting stench while Sungchul stood before it confidently and attempted another bargain. He appeared to be unfazed by anything.

As they descended the tower, Sophia recalled the words Sungchul had spoken to her over and over again in her mind.

‘Brother is going to become a monster like that? That can't happen. It can't.’

However, when she saw another High Devil residing on another tower, the doubt that had taken place in her mind grew as her

thoughts became befuddled. She searched for Elijah as soon as they exited the sixth tower after finishing all of its quests, but she could no longer see him hunched over beneath the blue tower. The creature that had been working below the tower was also nowhere to be found.

‘Could it be? Did brother already begin to act?’

Sophia felt her mind growing restless and looked visibly anxious. Sungchul continued to press forward in that uncomfortable silence.

“We’re moving to the next tower.”

“Excuse me...”

Sophia mustered up some courage. Sungchul turned toward her.

“I cannot see Elijah anymore.”

Sungchul pointed towards a location veiled by thick fog upon her words. Surprisingly, there was a shape of a human at the spot Sungchul had pointed to. It was Elijah.

Sophia felt a single tear welling in her eye as she attempted to run towards that location.

“Where are you going?”

Sungchul callously stopped her.

“I’m sorry, but I just want to check up on him.”

She immediately ran towards Elijah while Sungchul continued to look indifferently towards that place.

“Hm. Do I smell the familiar scent of tragedy?”

Bertelgia crawled out of his pocket and spoke some rather cold words.

“Is it perhaps your hobby to enjoy these kinds of situations?”

“Why do you think that?”

“If it was me, I might have stopped them physically or something. But, you always seem to just leave people to make their bad choices.”

“Choices have to be made on their own. The consequences of those choices are also on them as well. I do not have a reason, the right, or the obligation to convince them otherwise.”

Sophia ran over to Elijah in a sprint. Elijah was digging the ground, and she could see several piles of dirt all around.

“Brother.”

Sophia called out to him.

“Oh, Sophia. You’ve come.”

Elijah put down the shovel to warmly greet his sister. There were tiny beads of sweat on his brow, but he looked quite elated.

“Listen, Sophia. That monster from before. He brought up quite a reasonable offer.”

He revealed a dark marble that he had dug from the ground to her.

“What is this?”

It looked like a plain marble.

“It is a sealing orb capable of binding the power of a High Devil. This one is black since it’s already been used, but I was told that an unused one would be colorless. If I find that, then getting rid of a High Devil would be as easy as twisting the arms of a child.”

Elijah peeked over at Sungchul who stood tall on a plateau beyond the fog and spoke in a low voice.

“What do you think about the Enemy of the World?”

“Well, he’s no different than before.”

She tried to speak normally to the best of her abilities, but her eyes were trembling. Sungchul’s words and the image of the hideous High Devils were swirling in her mind. Fortunately, Elijah didn’t seem to notice in all of his excitement. He continued to speak to her in a hushed voice.

“Do you have any of the tomes?”

“Tomes?”

“I’m talking about the Tomes of the High Devils.”

“Yes. We managed to gather about 6 volumes. That man is probably looking to gather the final 2.”

“That’s good. Can you lend me just one? That... red one. The red one looks good.”

“But if the Enemy of the World notices...”

Sophia let her words trail as she lowered her head, but there was not a single hint of fear on Elijah’s face. He was making a once-in-a-lifetime gamble. It was full of flaws, but the blood of Martin

Breggas who remained aloof in the face of death flowed in his veins.

“It’s fine. Aren’t you going to leave it all in the Soul Storage anyways? It’s enough with just one volume, so don’t worry about it. It won’t take long. I’ll finish it before that guy notices.”

“.....”

Sophia felt conflicted, but she eventually relented. She covertly handed him the red Tome of the High Devils, but the moment she handed the book over, Sungchul’s words and the image of the hideous High Devils reappeared in her mind.

“Um, brother.”

Before Elijah managed to take the book from her, Sophia’s hand gripped the tome tightly.

“What’s the problem now, Sophia?”

Elijah asked in confusion.

“Do we really need to become a High Devil?”

“What are you talking about? Isn’t that the whole reason why we came here? Even at the cost of our friends’ lives?”

“But... becoming a High Devil. It doesn't seem like a good idea.”

“I think so too... But Sophia, we have no other options.”

It was the expected response.

Sophia's breathing grew tight as she finally managed to convey the words that had been buried deep in her heart.

“Let's just run away. To where no one knows us. To where no one can find us.”

It was something that she had wanted to say many times but didn't have the courage to. Unfortunately, her precious words were met with ridicule.

“What are you saying, Sophia?”

Elijah wore a mocking smile on his lips as though she was speaking nonsense. Sophia's eyes shook, but she managed to respond with a similar smile in kind.

“It was a joke. I must have lost my mind or something.”

She finally released the grip on the tome. The Tome of the High Devils fell into Elijah's hands.

“I’ll meet you later.”

Elijah who managed to get his hands on the tome placed it into his Soul Storage and began to dig the ground once again.

“Hurry back. That guy might notice.”

“O...ok.”

Sophia weakly nodded her head and returned to Sungchul

“ ... ”

Sungchul asked her nothing as she returned. Instead, he moved to the next tower. He managed to conquer the last 2 towers before even half of the day had passed. 48 quests from the High Devils were resolved within 2 days in his hands.

Sungchul opened his status window as he finished all of the ordinary quests.

[Stats]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Vitality 801 Magic Power 429

Intuition 422 Magic Resist 622

Magic Power and Intuition had both broken through 400. All that was left were the missions. There were 8 missions that requested the extermination of each High Devil. Sungchul felt that it was possible to complete 4 of them at maximum at this point. It was because there was a high chance for the mission to disappear due to the death of the High Devil that created it.

Each of the rewards for the missions were different. Sungchul decided to prioritize the missions that gave Magic Power and Intuition.

‘I didn’t check the fine details of the missions, but I might be able to break through the 500s for both Magic Power and Intuition if I’m lucky.’

If he were to surpass his initial goal and reach a level where he could learn Primordial light, Sungchul would immediately head over to the Deep Sea Demon to test its power, and then seek the Demon King.

‘Finally, the resolution to the First Calamity is in sight.’

It wasn’t that long ago when he had known no magic at all. But in under a year, he had managed to earn enough Magic Power to rightfully call himself a Grand Mage. Sungchul could feel an excitement in his heart that hadn’t been felt for a long time as he

turned to Sophia with an order.

“Bring out all 8 Tomes of the High Devils.”

When she heard his command, her eyes shook like an earthquake.

Chapter 92 – The Abandoned (3)

Sophia laid down seven Tomes of the High Devils in order. However, the red tome couldn't be found.

“Why is a book missing?”

Sungchul asked her bluntly.

“T-That is...”

“Tell me truthfully. Where is the book?”

“...”

Sophia did not answer. Bertelgia dug herself deeper into Sungchul's pocket. It was because she guessed what was going to happen next.

‘Corpses of pretty girls are more unpleasant for some reason... I don't wanna see it.’

However, Sungchul did nothing to Sophia. He moved past her trembling form towards the tomes on the floor and looked over them one by one.

‘I think the red Tome of the High Devils rewarded with Strength and Dexterity which I don't require.’

He remembered the contents well as it was the first tome he had received. He turned toward the pale-faced Sophia and said,

“Open the book and show me the mission.”

Sophia uncharacteristically jumped up and scrambled to do as he ordered.

Sungchul arranged the books so that he could see them all lined up and compared their rewards. Intuition was the priority. He could make do with less Magic Power, but without sufficient Intuition, it wasn't possible to learn the final spell of Cosmomancy. So he gave Intuition first priority followed by Magic Power. Then he made sure the target of the tomes and the benefactors did not conflict with each other. Through this method, he narrowed it down to the three missions that he had to complete first.

Tome of the High Devil: Volume 1 – Intuition 30, Magic Power 15, Charisma 15

Tome of the High Devil: Volume 5 – Intuition 20, Magic Power 10, Charisma 20

Tome of the High Devil: Volume 8 – Intuition 10, Magic Power 10, Luck 30

There were various items offered besides the stats, but Sungchul wasn't concerned with that part. He remained fixated on the stats.

'That's 60 points for just Intuition. If I can complete all of them, I'll be able to get close to my goal of 500 for Intuition.'

Sungchul's pace quickened.

"Grab the books and follow me."

Fal Garaz appeared in his hand, and he first entered the green tower. Sungchul gave Sophia an order before the entrance to the High Devil's room.

"Hand over the book and wait here."

Sophia handed over the book. It was then given to Bertelgia who carried the opened tome on top of her opened pages.

"Hup!"

Sungchul entered the room of the High Devil with Bertelgia while Sophia stayed behind praying for his demise.

'Please. Dear God, please kill that man. Only with his death can my brother and I survive.'

It was her first time praying, so she didn't know the proper method to pray, but her sincerity was more than enough to reach the heavens and beyond.

Meanwhile, the High Devil had disassembled himself into a troupe of forty two wooden marionettes; one was forty two and all forty two were one. The devil then spoke through the mouths of the dolls in chorus.

“I plainly ordered you to exterminate the scum, so why are you defying my command?”

“We should make the defiant child into a puppet!”

“Puppets listen to orders very well!”

“Are you stupid? Aren't puppets created to follow commands?”

“Those are wise words!”

As the strings attached to each of the 42 clapping marionettes moved in tandem, Sungchul gripped Fal Garaz and leaped towards the ceiling where the strings tying each puppet were gathered. There he could see a massive squirming brain. Sungchul rose up into the air with the hammer.

“Is it a fight?”

“If it’s a fight, we gotta get in on it!”

The marionettes chased after Sungchul and impeded his path. But from the beginning, the High Devil had not been a match for him.

Wham! Blam! Smash!

With a single blow, the marionettes, each holding a piece of the High Devil’s flesh, were smashed to pieces. The marionettes continued to charge in fearlessly as if to prove that they were existences that followed commands, but all of it was meaningless. Every marionette of the High Devil’s troupe was destroyed. The High Devil finally realized that his meager existence could not compare to the human before him when only his brain remained.

“Y-you are? Just what are you?”

“I’ve always liked rag-dolls more than wooden puppets.

Fal Garaz dealt the final blow. Sungchul read the shining message that appeared before him in the midst of a shower of brain viscera.

[You have dealt an execution befitting the mission.]

[Very Impressive! You have carried out the punishment of the

serial killer obsessed with puppets, Herik Mas, in place of god.]

[High Devil Kadenburr is overjoyed.]

Basic Reward:

Intuition 30

Magic Power 10

Charisma 15

Worn-out Bone

The Tome of the High Devils that had been held by Bertelgia overflowed with a sinister light as an unknown power held within was liberated, and this contained power along with an item was given to Sungchul. Unfortunately, he was unable to receive everything.

[Due to an unknown curse, one of your stats, Charisma, is blocked from increasing.]

However, this was not important. Sungchul confirmed that the two stats he was concerned about had increased and then looked at the item.

[Worn-out Bone]

Grade: Legendary

Type: Inheritance of Power

Effect: Upon usage, one's soul and flesh are used as a sacrifice to receive the power of the High Devil.

Note: Even the corpse of a great Devil contains great power.

Restriction: None

It was as expected. It was an item that granted the power of a High Devil simply upon its use. For now, Sungchul put away the Worn-out Bone into his Soul Storage before leaving the room of the High Devil. Outside, Sophia was kneeling in prayer.

“What are you praying so hard for?”

Sungchul asked as he gazed at her with indifference. Sophia looked at him with frantic eyes.

‘He came out so quickly without a single injury? No way. Even if the man is the Enemy of the World, his opponent was a High Devil...’

She knew that Sungchul was powerful, but she didn’t know how powerful. It was because the man named Sungchul was not someone she was capable of gauging the strength of. He spoke bluntly to the blankly staring Sophia.

“Why are you spacing out for?”

He began to descend the stairs first. As he was walking down, Bertelgia fluttered behind him and asked a question.

“Why haven’t you killed her? With your personality, I thought you’d have killed her a long time ago.”

“....”

“Could it be... she’s your type?”

“Don’t joke around. I only let her live because I don’t have any reason to kill her.”

And that fate would soon come for her without him doing a thing to her. Sungchul did not have the ability to look into the future, but he had a strong premonition with regards to Sophia. Those

that treasured another's life before their own never lived for long.

When they left the green tower, an unfamiliar scene appeared before them. The bases of the towers that had been completely desolate were filled with devil worshippers looking towards the green tower.

“The High Devil Troupe was killed. Who do you think is the new High Devil?”

“I hope someone REALLY insane appears this time.”

“The Troupe's hobby was childish. He was needlessly cruel too.”

When Sungchul exited the tower, the devil worshippers gathered like flies.

“Could that human be the one who took care of the High Devil?”

“Couldn't be. If he'd killed the High Devil, he'd be the new High Devil.”

Sungchul lightly swung his hammer to scatter the devil worshippers.

“Get lost.”

Most of them retreated, but one of them was filled with bravado and continued to approach Sungchul. He appeared to be daring Sungchul to strike him. When their eyes met, the devil worshipper allowed himself a smirk.

Sungchul pulled out a rope he liked from his Soul Storage. He grabbed the smirking devil worshipper's neck and quickly wrapped the rope around it, then hung him on a dried out tree nearby. The foolhardy devil worshipper reverted to a maggot and struggled violently, but he soon fell limp.

“...”

The crowd of devil worshippers now parted to form a path wherever Sungchul walked.

Sungchul looked toward the gray tower which was his next target. The gray tower was quite different from the green. Half-human and half-demon monsters who looked like guards blocked his path on the first floor.

“Reveal your identity! Human!”

They hadn't been there on Sungchul's previous visit and looked to be numbered in the hundreds. It looked as though all the High Devils were raising their defenses in response to the death of their kin.

Sophia's face grew stiff as she drew her blade. She had come to

the conclusion that the number of enemies would prove difficult, even for Sungchul. However, Fal Garaz moved quickly and

Wham! Bam! Wham!

the monsters standing before them became blood stains. There was no forgiveness or mercy in Sungchul's blows. Whenever the hammer moved, it would force a conclusion to any matter. The monsters tried to escape in a panic as they lost half their numbers. Sungchul did give chase and Sophia stood awkwardly with her sword half-drawn before sheathing it once again.

‘Crazy. This is complete madness!’

She had felt that she had grown since she had arrived in this place, but Sophia realized now that she was less than a speck of dirt in relation to the man standing before her.

Sungchul continued to move forward again. He destroyed everything blocking his path until he found himself on the top floor of the gray tower where he took care of the High Devil.

Contrary to the last battle, Sungchul did not even give him a chance to speak this time. He entered the High Devil's room as though it was his own living room, beat the devil down with a single blow, then took the rewards before heading to the next tower.

The same process was utilized again. The only difference was

that the High Devil of this tower was wiser than the previous two and with a cowardly appearance, he tried to negotiate for his life.

“Shall we make a bargain?”

Sungchul’s response was a single blow of the hammer.

Wham!

Bertelgia who looked at the High Devil’s corpse that had been crushed with a single blow spoke as though she had been waiting for it all along.

“Bzzz! You aren’t good enough for a trade!”

“....”

Sungchul again felt the ominous light spilling out of the Tome of the High Devil seeping into him, but an unexpected obstacle appeared.

[Warning! Your intuition is too high, only a portion of the Intuition will be transferred.]

Sungchul immediately checked his status screen.

[Stats]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Vitality 801 Magic Power 474

Intuition 477 Magic Resist 622

Resolve 502 Charisma 18

Luck 18

Sungchul who noticed the number confirmed something to himself.

‘It looks like the High Devil that gave this quest had 477 intuition.’

The High Devil that had given him the quest was the giant whose body was filled with large nails carrying a disgusting stench. His appearance did not give off the impression that he was all that intelligent, but he must have been. Not to mention that having over 500 points for any stat was also known as the realm of transcendence. As Sungchul saw it, the High Devils were merely at the cusp of transcendence. One that specialized in magic might have reached transcendence, but those that weren't would not be able to reach that level with their Magic Power or Intuition alone.

As Sungchul saw it, the High Devils were merely at the cusp of transcendence. The ones who specialized in magic might have reached transcendence in Magic Power and Intuition, but those that didn't were unable to cross the threshold.

In any case, Sungchul had completed all 3 missions that he had set as his goal.

‘I managed to do everything I wanted.’

The other missions were unnecessary to him. He had never considered becoming one of these pathetic High Devils from the beginning. Sungchul left the tower without regret.

Outside the tower, there were more devil worshippers than before. Sungchul saw a man kneeling before him. The man had an emaciated appearance akin to that of a skeleton and looked similar to the people that could commonly be seen in the tower known as the Tower of Enlightenment.

“I-I have something to say to you. Hero of the Living!”

“What is it?”

Sungchul quietly pulled out his favorite rope from his Soul Storage as he asked.

The man bowed his head low before speaking in a courteous tone.

“I promise you that we are not your enemy. We may be called devil worshippers, but this was a choice that was forced upon us.

We had abandoned our humanity and chosen servitude under the Devils to escape the Curse of Extinction as there were no other options.”

“Why are you telling me this? I don’t recall asking about your situation.”

“Please do not harm the High Devils, Hero of the Living!”

The emaciated man smashed his head onto the ground as he shouted with sincerity.

“They might be evil existences deserving extermination in your eyes, but they are necessary evils in our lives who protect us from the other Devils. Without them, we will become enslaved or eaten by the other Devils.”

“That isn’t my concern.”

Sungchul callously spoke as he turned around. However, the man didn’t relent. Even after having the rope tied around his neck his response remained the same. He was different from the others. That was what Sungchul thought as he released the man.

“I didn’t have any intention of killing the other High Devils anyways.”

A familiar form appeared in Sungchul’s eyes. The black mask and clothes of an undertaker. A monstrous man with a twisted body

was mixed in with the crowd.

‘That guy is?’

It was the tempter who had promised to tell them of a method to kill the High Devils. Sungchul turned and stepped toward the monstrous man.

“You.”

Sungchul stood before him. The man tried to retreat, but Sungchul’s hammer blocked his path.

“Where is Elijah Breggas?” Sungchul asked.

The man already knew of Sungchul’s strength and so he spoke quickly while trembling.

“Te-eh-eh-eh... blue tower... He’s challenging the master of the blue tower!”

Sophia was the first to act upon hearing the news.

“Brother!”

Sungchul’s arm stopped her as she tried to hurry forward.

“Follow behind me.”

Chapter 93 – The Abandoned (4)

Sungchul headed towards the top of the blue tower, and no one dared to cross his path. The battle of Elijah and the High Devil of the blue tower awaited him on the top floor. By the time he arrived, the conclusion had already been drawn. The High Devil with the head of a fly seemed to be unscathed while Elijah Breggas was tired and on the defensive. There was a black colored marble rolling by his feet.

“Regardless of your schemes, you cannot win at your level of strength.”

The High Devil who had been flying in the air landed in front of Elijah. He was close enough that Elijah could reach out and touch him, but Elijah could not respond. There wasn't even enough strength left in his body to lift a finger.

‘Shit. Is it because I only managed to find a single marble? I should have listened to the bastard and gathered at least 3.’

The information regarding the marbles sealing the strength of the High Devils turned out to be true. It acted as a sponge for the oppressive amounts of Magic Power that sustained their bodies, but it wasn't nearly enough with a single marble.

The twisted man had recommended Elijah to wait until he had gathered at least three marbles, but the news of the death of the High Devil Troupe had spread panic among the residents of the towers. Elijah felt like he was running out of time, and so he

challenged the High Devil before he was ready. As a result, he was defeated. Elijah who was out of Mana and stamina couldn't do anything but watch the Devil approach him.

It was at this moment that the massive doorway to the High Devil's room burst open, and the atmosphere of the room changed instantly. The one who entered the room was none other than the Enemy of the World.

“...”

Sungchul looked around the surroundings with disinterest and walked over to their direction while Sophia and Bertelgia followed behind him. Sophia recognized Elijah and shouted,

“Brother!”

The High Devil who had been preparing to deliver the final blow unconsciously stepped back. He could feel a fearsome hostility and fighting spirit radiating from Sungchul's body that he hadn't felt before.

‘Could it be... Was he the one who killed the High Devil Troupe along with the other High Devils?’

If that was the case, it didn't matter what happened to the pathetic human standing before him. The High Devil looked towards Sungchul and said,

“Why have you returned to this place?”

Sungchul did not answer. He took a step back and simply crossed his arms as he observed Elijah and the High Devil. It was an unspoken sign that signified that he had no intention to interfere.

The cunning High Devil understood Sungchul's intent and turned his hideous fly head towards Elijah once again. It wasn't possible to actually know whether the High Devil was smiling or not, but he was definitely laughing.

“Kekeke... Have you been cast aside?”

“....”

Elijah's face grew twisted. He had nothing to say. Strictly speaking, it wasn't him that was abandoned, but rather he who abandoned them.

The High Devil took another step closer. In between the fancy robes reminiscent of a judge's gown, the mutilated hand of a corpse shot out. It held a large spoon in its hand.

“I'll suck your brain while you're alive!”

Elijah pulled out his blade and faced off against the High Devil, but the conclusion was quite obvious. He wouldn't last much longer. Sophia who noticed Elijah fighting for his life let out a short scream and quickly approached Sungchul.

“I beg of you. Please save my brother.”

It was the first time when she had lowered her head to him.

“....”

However, Sungchul did not respond verbally or physically. Sophia grew panicked and began fidgeting with her arms. Fortunately, she managed to quickly take a deep breath and pleaded to Sungchul once again.

“I’ll do anything, if it will save my brother. Please. Please save him! You have the power to do so.”

“...It was his personal decision. I have no obligation to intervene.”

Sungchul spoke bluntly wasting no words.

A dark shadow passed by Sophia’s eyes. She could see with a glance that he wasn’t to be persuaded, and so she bit down on her lower lip and bowed her head once again. Her slim form was trembling slightly. She turned to face the High Devil as she drew her blade.

“... I have no excuse. I have shown you something shameful.”

“ ... ”

“I am grateful for your help this far.”

Sophia turned again towards Sungchul and gave a polite nod before rushing towards the High Devil. Sungchul’s eye lit up with interest.

‘She was unexpectedly a good kid.’

If it had been anyone else, they might have shouted profanities towards him before leaving. It was human nature to resent a single moment of refusal regardless of the amount of generosity shown before. However, Sophia Breggas was better than most regarding this. This should be a natural etiquette, but there weren’t many good people in Other World.

“Hmm.”

Bertelgia began to circle around Sungchul’s back as though she had something to say.

“What is it?”

Sungchul asked without taking his eyes off of Sophia who was wielding Cryomancy against the High Devil.

“That woman. She doesn’t look so bad. She looks a lot more

decent than that Elijah or whoever.”

“So what are you trying to say?”

“Can’t you save her? You went out of your way to save that Sarasa or Sarada girl from before.”

“ ... ”

“Is it because she’s not your type?”

“Stop blabbering nonsense before I tear you apart.”

“Hiii...”

Bertelgia was intimidated by Sungchul’s threat and backed away, shivering. Sunghcul turned back towards the battle when the annoying kid left his sight. Sophia was putting up a good fight, but it also seemed that she wouldn’t last much longer.

“Kekeke! Human trash! You’re skittering about without knowing your place!”

Terrifying swarms of giant flies flew out from his robe and enveloped Sophia.

“Ice Storm!”

She used a spell in an attempt to freeze the fly swarm, but there was no end to them as they kept on flying out of the High Devil's robe. The flies managed to break through the spell and overwhelmed the siblings. Sophia's sword danced gracefully while felling the flies, but Elijah was completely defenseless. She noticed Elijah's crisis and ran towards his side, but unfortunately, the giant flies aiming towards her back managed to tackle her with their bodies.

“Ugh!”

Sophia let out a shout, but she soon regained her posture and managed to reach her brother's side while repelling the swarm with magic. Fortunately, Elijah was still alive.

“Are you ok, brother?”

“...”

Elijah nodded weakly. The swarm of flies surrounded both of the siblings. Sophia looked at the countless flies circling them and instinctively knew that they had no chance of survival. Now that she was facing imminent death, she broke into a grin. She began reminiscing an unforgettable scene from her past.

“Do you remember? When we first met?”

She was a girl who lived with the pigs in the pigpen. A miracle

came to visit this girl who had been looking after the livestock day after day without the possibility of a better future. Sophia could still remember the well-groomed boy standing in front of the pig pen with a shocked expression on his face.

“...”

Elijah didn't respond. It was because the situation didn't call for such leisurely conversation, but Sophia seemed to have a lot on her mind. She knew better than anyone that they would not have much more opportunities to have a conversation like this.

“There were swarms of flies around us then too, though none of them were this big!”

She began to laugh openly as though something was funny to her.

A few swarms of flies let loose a fierce attack. Sophia sliced through them with her blade leaving their halves on the floor, but there was still hundreds more flying around her.

“I'll break through the front.”

Sophia spoke resolutely.

“When I do, run to the Enemy of the World, brother. Get on your knees before his feet and beg for your life.”

“Sophia...”

“That’s the only way for brother to survive.”

As soon as the words left her lips, Sophia poured the last ounce of her magic into a fierce magical assault to attack the swarm. The fearsome storm of frost roared as though it would freeze the entire room of the gigantic High Devil. Elijah ran out as the swarm of flies began to falter.

Sophia looked towards his retreating figure and allowed herself a quiet smile, but the swarm of flies quickly swallowed her up. Elijah clenched his eyes as he ran over to Sungchul with all of his strength.

“....”

Sungchul looked at Elijah groveling before his feet with indifference.

“Please. Please help.”

“Who are you asking for me to save?” retorted Sungchul callously.

Elijah looked at him as though he didn’t understand, so Sungchul pointed his finger towards Sophia where the battle was still

fiercely raging on.

“There? Or here?”

“T-that is...”

Elijah had nowhere to look. His eyes shook as he continued to stare at the ground. Sungchul walked past him with disappointment hanging densely in his eyes. Bertelgia flew past him as well but allowed herself a single cold word.

“Garbage.”

Sungchul walked towards the High Devil who retreated in surprise when it sensed his approach.

“W-what is it? Are you trying to challenge me as well?!”

The High Devils emaciated hand moved, and the countless flies swarming around Sophia began to attack Sungchul. But, their enemy this time was not on the same level.

Fal Garaz struck the air.

Boom!

The hammer when swung with his godlike strength, resulted in

air waves that destroyed everything within its vicinity. The thousands of windows in the room shattered simultaneously and the eardrums of the human maggots spectating the battle ruptured while the swarm of flies in the air popped into a bloody mass.

“....”

Sungchul continued to approach the High Devil who had nothing left in his arsenal.

“N-negotiation! Let’s negotiate!”

The High Devil spoke in a panic, but it was already too late. Fal Garaz rose again in the air and then it fell. Sungchul put the smashed body of the High Devil behind him as he turned around. Sophia was lying on the floor; her body was riddled with injuries large and small. He approached her to gauge her condition. She was still breathing, but not for much longer.

Sungchul looked over at Elijah hurrying over to the High Devil’s corpse to loot the item on the floor with disinterest.

“Look! Sophia! High Devil! I got the item that can make me into a High Devil! Finally... I finally have the strength to get my revenge on that person!”

He was hopping about while shouting like a madman. Sophia’s dull eyes looked at that excited figure and smiled weakly.

“...Let’s go.”

Sungchul started to walk away.

“Weren’t you going to save her?”

Bertelgia asked sadly while following behind him.

“Her death here might be the greatest ending she could hope for. Just so that she could be spared from the hell that would await her from this point on.”

Sungchul let out a shallow sigh as he left the room. Meaningless cheers of celebration echoed out from the empty room of the High Devil

—

It was a usual day of training. Sungchul sought out a rundown bar for a bit of peace and quiet when he heard news of a new powerful Devil appearing in the Demon Realm. He seemed to have appeared in the area under the jurisdiction of the Storm Battlefront. This Devil threatening the Dwarven fortifications was powerful, but it was gaining more notoriety for its unusual appearance.

The Devil was terrible to behold as it bled from its empty eye sockets formed after it ripped its own eyes out. But it carried a corpse of a beautiful woman tied to its back. They say that this

Devil seemed to shout some nonsense occasionally as he assaulted the Dwarven walls which people have assumed was the name of the woman hanging behind him.

“ ... ”

Sungchul did not speak regarding this matter. Instead, he bought a bottle of alcohol and returned home.

‘It’s almost over.’

Sungchul felt the strong alcohol rumbling in his stomach as he looked toward the skyline of the Demon Realm.

Chapter 94 – Order Of The Iron Blood Knights (1)

Lord Martin Breggas looked on at the Knights prostrating before him with apathetic eyes. The Knights were bowing before him in pitiful indignation trying to appeal to his mercy.

“Our frontlines have been obliterated. Most of the Mobile Fortifications have been destroyed, and we have lost countless Knights. Without reinforcements, we might not last much longer.”

They were the Knights of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights. The Order had been receiving concentrated attacks by the Demons since a distant past. It has long been a tradition among the Demons to halt their offensive during the winter, but they had broken praxis and continued their assault through the winter driving the Order into a corner.

The Order of the Blood Iron Knights had immediately requested support from Martin Breggas who oversaw the Demon Realm Battlefront, but for one reason or another, he didn't even send meager reinforcements to complain about. It was also becoming increasingly clear by the man's attitude that he didn't intend to send any support. As Lord Breggas did not utter a single word, the Knights clenched their lips and left. The eyes of the Knights who looked back from outside the door were filled with rage and resentment.

When the doors shut, Martin yawned as he picked at his ear. His attendant who was standing beside him carefully drew closer.

“Is it ok to just send them back? I have learned that the Order of the Iron Blood Knights is truly in a critical state.”

“How critical?”

Martin squinted at the ear booger that had been stuck to his finger as he asked his question.

“The Order has lost 60% of their military forces. With the exception of their last line of defense at the ‘Fortress of the Iron Blood Cross’, every other base is under siege or captured. They will not last once spring arrives.”

“Is that so? That’s good news. I didn’t like their kind from the beginning. Worthless Summoned referring to themselves as an order of knights. It might not be so bad to let them fall given this opportunity?”

Martin drank the milk poured into his cup with a relatively gleeful expression on his face.

“But, Lord Martin. If the Order of the Blood Iron Knights fall, the Demon Army will head toward our direction. Not to mention the blame for the fall and destruction of the Order will be on our heads as well.”

“Don’t worry about that. Wasn’t it for this purpose that we poured our hard-earned money to develop our friends over here?”

Martin rose from his seat and stepped towards the window. Beyond the window filled with the blinding rays of the sun, soldiers numbering in the thousands were awaiting orders in neat formations. Soon, a youth dressed in lavish clothes stood on a podium and spoke to the soldiers in a cheery voice. The contents of the speech could not be heard from here, but Martin had a satisfied smile as he looked at the youth's backside.

“If the Order of the Iron Blood Knights fall, we can just have him contain the situation.”

Martin had countless illegitimate children. Parlim Dargot, the leader of the militia of Trowyn the army which Martin had poured his heart and soul over for a long time to create, was one such child. Being the child of a dancer at a bar Parlim could not use his father's name, but if he were to thwart this demon invasion which put the Iron Blood Knights in peril, then he would be in a position to lay claim as the true heir of Martin Breggas.

“Reinforcements will only be sent once the Order of the Iron Blood Knights fall.”

Martin was prepared to devote all of his effort for the child of the sole woman that held his heart.

On the other hand, upon hearing this news, the Order of the Iron Blood Knights prepared to use their trump card that they had been holding back until now.

The Leader of the Iron Blood Knights, Sungtek Jo.

He had once been hailed as a great hero and word of his might was spread through the North, perhaps even the entire continent. But he was currently diminished to the state of a local feudal lord. Nothing had been going his way even to the point where he tragically lost his child that had been summoned through the Summoning Palace recently; he had been living bitterly in resentment ever since. The situations that surrounded him displeased him greatly.

“If you bastards are going to come at me like this, then I also have my own plans.”

Sungtek ordered for his guest whom he had secretly accommodated at the palace to be brought before him. A strange being with the wings of a bat, hooves of a goat, and the head of a human was brought to his audience chamber. Surprisingly, the guest's identity was a demon.

“Have you finally made a decision?”

The demon quietly asked in a soothing voice that was pleasing to the ears. A frown appeared on Sungtek's forehead. It was possible that this decision would destroy all the reputation and renown he had accumulated over the years. However, when he thought about it, did any of those have any value?

‘The children I sired in Other World have died from the curse and even my little Ahram brought to the Summoning Palace was

killed pitifully by the brats of the other bastards. And even Martin Breggas, that son of a whore who couldn't look me in the eye, now wishes for my ruin.'

It didn't take long for Sungtek to reach a conclusion. He soon raised his head and spoke politely towards the devil standing in the corner.

"... I will collaborate with your king. However, do not forget to fulfill your end of the bargain."

Eight years ago, the 13 Continental Champions agreed to prolong the approaching Calamity at the first stage, which seemed the most manageable, and set this plan into motion. A single Champion had opposed obstinately and deserted the group in the process, but the Calamity was managed smoothly over the past eight years, and those in power enjoyed great wealth and prosperity no different than before.

However, the Calamity cannot be stopped.

The words 'cannot be stopped' actually also included the fact that it also cannot be delayed, but the people often thought of these two ideas as two separate things.

The Calamity that the people mistakenly believed was postponed would continue to grow stronger and stronger until it breaks free and unleashes upon the world even more violently than before.

The meteor fell from the sky and critically struck the Deep Sea Demon. Successive meteors fell without any additional Aria. The number of echoes had naturally increased as his magic power grew. Sungchul who was getting close to reaching the value of 500 for magic power gained an additional 2 echoes for every spell that he had cast. In other words, two additional meteors would fall for every single cast.

“Guwaaaaa....”

The Deep Sea Demon could not endure the consecutive blows from the powerful meteor. This meant that Sungchul who used to beat up the Deep Sea Demon once a week now had to change his schedule to beating it up once every 2 weeks. If he went any further, he might end up killing the demon.

‘If it were possible to land a meteor on the Demon King, then seeking him out now wouldn’t be a problem.’

The Meteor’s might was of the highest grade among all the spells in the world. The greatest problem was with its accuracy. But if it were to hit, it might even be enough to critically injure the Demon King when combined with the echo effects. However, Sungchul did not rush forward.

‘Intuition is going to hit 500 soon.’

Currently, it was sitting at 479. A month and two weeks had passed since he left the Tower of the Devil Worshipers, but he only managed to raise his Intuition by 2. He thankfully had Alchemy to raise it by that much, because otherwise, his growth would have stopped completely. As a result, he was also about to complete a quest of the Path of the Creationist after a long while.

“More! A bit more!”

Sungchul felt his enormous magic power being drained away as he mightily stirred the cauldron. He could smell a unique scent emanating from Eckheart’s Portable Alchemic Cauldron before a blinding light poured out to signify the success of a creation.

[Synthesis Success!]

Sungchul confirmed the message that appeared before his eyes as he held up the new Alchemic item within his cauldron. It was a statue of a duck radiating a golden light. Sungchul had improved from being limited to altering simple characteristics of ingredients to being able to create specific forms using the Alchemic Cauldron.

[Golden Duck]

Level: 4

Grade: B

Attribute: Gold

Type: Everyday Item

Note: Floats when placed in the bath.

“....”

It was a relatively useless item. It radiated with blinding golden light, looked adorable, and floated on water despite the material it was made of, but it couldn't be gauged with any more significance than a useless trinket. There were too many items in Alchemy that weren't helpful in combat.

Despite this fact, Sungchul continued to pump out items in order to complete Bertelgia's Illustrated Alchemic Collection Journal. He had finally managed to complete everything that Bertelgia had categorized as basic Alchemy. The rewards were slowly being unveiled.

“Hm Hm. You've done well. You've finally taken a step onto the true path of Creationist from being a human butcher!”

A strange light poured out from Bertelgia's body as she fluttered in the air and enveloped Sungchul's body. Sungchul finally witnessed the long awaited message within its splendor.

[You have followed the great legacy of the Eighth Hero, Eckheart, and succeeded in recreating one of his great inventions.]

[Ordinary Illustrations Complete!]

Reward: Magic Power +20

Intuition +20

Eckheart’s Collection Notebook

Sungchul immediately brought up his stats.

[Stats]

Strength 999+ Dexterity 853

Vitality 801 Magic Power 494

Intuition 499 Magic Resist 622

Resilience 502 Charisma 18

“Mmmm....”

He was 1 short. He was 1 short of hitting 500. As he managed to raise his intuition through Alchemy 3 days ago, it would take three weeks minimum and a month maximum of Alchemy to raise it once again.

“How is it? How do you feel taking in the knowledge of the Creationist?”

Bertelgia spoke proudly.

“Very unhappy.”

“W-What? What did you just say!”

“I didn’t mean that. I’m just a bit short on my stats.”

Sungchul sighed as he gazed out towards the Demon Realms sky. Deep regret welled in his heart. If everything had gone according to plan, he would have killed Hesthnius Max today and resolved the first Calamity. His plans had gone awry due to his unexpectedly stunted growth.

Sungchul calmed his turbulent heart and gathered the other reward that had fallen beside his feet. It was a small book which he opened immediately. It was filled with illustrations and microscopic letters written in ink that moved freely in the pages. Sungchul read one of the passages.

[... Ogres of the Foggy Mountain Range sleep on beds of rock. To human eyes, the bed of rock may appear like any other bed of rock, but to Ogres, they have some standards with which they rate these rocks. They rated excellent beds of rock with stars. And the more stars it was rated, the better it was. Upon the great bed of rock, there are...]

Sungchul read up to that point and put the book down. It prattled on pointlessly, but Eckheart's Collection Notebook appeared to be some kind of guide with the locations of rare Alchemic Ingredients recorded within. The problem was that the era in which Eckheart lived and the current era in which Sungchul lived had a vast gap in time.

“... I can't use this.”

There were major differences even in that page he had just read. The Foggy Mountain Range that Sungchul visited in his time didn't have Ogres living within it. Through frequent subjugation by the humans and enslavement by the orcs, it had been a long while since the Ogre Kingdom had vanished.

Sungchul placed the notebook into his Soul Storage and grabbed the duck before leaving.

“You didn’t like papa’s notebook? He might be a worthless person, but his information is real!”

Bertelgia followed behind and spoke in a sullen tone, but Sungchul didn’t pay them any mind. He arrived at a hot spring that reeked of sulfur. It was a bath that he occasionally visited.

Sungchul tossed away his clothes.

“Oh my god!”

Bertelgia quickly hid herself behind a tree, and when she sneakily peeked from one side, the hardened body of a man veiled by steam came into her sights. The countless scars and burns across his wide back appeared like medals for Sungchul who lived a life of conflict.

Sungchul immersed his body into the hot spring and floated the golden duck that he had just created. The golden duck that had been made entirely of gold surprisingly began to float around Sungchul’s vicinity.

“It really does float.”

An amused smile slipped onto Sungchul’s lips. Cries of Devils rang out from a distance souring the mood, but overall, it was a decent bath. Sungchul closed his eyes and let time slip by.

It isn't clear how much time had passed since that moment, but a muffled explosion could be heard from the southeast side. It was in the direction of the fortifications along the Storm Battlefront. He tried to ignore the noise, but the sound of explosions continued and he could hear the faint sound of drums.

‘Did a battle break out? Can't be. I didn't notice any activity from the Demon army to the north.’

He felt a terrible premonition.

Chapter 95 – Order Of The Iron Blood Knights (2)

Sungchul dressed himself and hurried toward the tallest peak in his vicinity at once. He was able to look over a large area once he climbed the perilous peak known as the Palm Tree Peak named for its likeness to a palm tree. The dwarven fortress was one of the areas visible from the vantage point.

Sungchul found the dwarven fortress within the mountain range that seemed to unfold endlessly before him, however finding it turned out to be easier than expected. The fortress stood at the source of a black smoke rising into the sky.

Suspicion rose within Sungchul's mind.

‘Were they attacked from the rear?’

The battle was taking place at the southern and eastern fronts where the defense was substantially weaker, and not the usual northern front. But the directions the Demons had come from were territories defended by allies. More importantly, the eastern front was overseen by the Order of the Iron Blood Knights that managed another neighboring battlefield. An assault from that side meant the Order of the Iron Blood Knights had already fallen.

‘Now that I think about it, I had heard from several sources that the state of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights wasn't good. But still...’

The defensive focus of the Storm Battlefield lying deep within this perilous mountain range was incomparably more narrow to the Order of the Iron Blood Knights that defended an open field. If the devils had pushed in this far, it meant that the final defensive line of the Iron Blood Knights other than the Fortress of the Iron Blood Cross had been demolished.

“...”

The front lines of the Demon Realm were being shaken, and if they crumbled, humans of Other World would witness true hell.

“What will you do?”

Bertelgia asked while looking down on the burning fortress below.

Sungchul pulled out something from his Soul Storage. It wasn't Fal Garaz that he favored, but a discolored and worn out iron sword.

“We're helping the Dwarves.”

“Huh? What miracle brought this on? You're actually helping other people?”

“I owe the dwarves a debt.”

Before he became the Enemy of the World, Sungchul maintained an amicable relationship with the dwarves. It was a part of this goodwill that allowed them to share their secret of where Fal Garaz had been hidden. Unfortunately, it was this show of good faith that had been turned against them. The destruction of the entire front line of the Demon Realm at this point wasn't a part of Sungchul's bigger picture.

‘There is a need to maintain the current status quo before the approaching battle against the Seven Heroes. It will be the responsibility of the humans and their allies to restrict the movement of the Seven Heroes.’

Sungchul headed toward the burning fortress with the iron sword in hand.

An intense battle was unfolding around the entire fortress. Dwarven artillery rained down fire upon the Devil forces, while the Hell Siege Engines from the Devils answered back with the Flames of Destruction. The artillery that the dwarves were so proud of remained standing, but the fort walls were crumbling under the assault of the Hell Siege Engines which allowed the Devils to find the opportunity to latch their ladders onto the walls. The Dwarven Axemen desperately tried to chop down the ladders, but the Devils positioned below the walls were not going to simply watch it happen. Hundreds of bolts flew toward the dwarves.

“Guwaaa!”

The dwarves that had been chopping down the ladders were struck by these bolts and fell down the dizzying heights of the castle walls. The devils that were watching the scene felt their morale soar; causing them to shout or howl in cheer.

“Press harder!”

The one leading the devils was a Barloq with massive wings dressed with a white gold helmet. The devil that held a whip reminiscent of the Demonic Weapon Cassandra, roamed the skies while commanding his men for battle.

The flames of the Hell Siege Engines continued to roar ceaselessly, and dozens of ladders flew toward the castle walls in response to the siege.

“Stop them! Stop those bastards!”

The Dwarf commander could recognize the fact that this was a critical moment for this battle, but they were outnumbered. The enemy came well prepared with overwhelming forces from an unforeseen direction, and in contrast, the dwarves fought bravely but couldn't overcome their weaknesses.

It was at this moment when a massive magical formation appeared in the sky which was dyed red by the smoke and flames. The magical formation was revealed to be connected directly to the vastness of the great space, and it spat out a fragment of the skies that was a meteor. This meteor landed onto the mob of devils that were densely packed beneath the castle walls and laid them to

waste. The core spell of Cosmomancy, Meteor, which boasted the most destructive might among all branches of magic was on full display at the northern end of the battlefield.

‘Oh! Is it reinforcements?’

The dwarven eyes that had been driven to despair were now filled with hope as they sought out the Mage. However, what they saw with their eyes wasn't the army they desired, but only a single man standing on top of a steep mountain slope with a ragged coat fluttering in the wind and an iron sword in his hand. There also appeared to be a book flapping behind him. But even then, he was good news for the dwarves.

Sungchul did not activate the echoes. He wanted to land the most cost effective blows possible out of consideration of his limitations with mana. The current Sungchul could only use Meteor a total of 20 times with his mana pool. Sungchul left Bertelgia to mind the remaining number and inserted himself into battle.

“19 shots left!”

Sungchul took notice of Bertelgia's shout as he turned his sights toward another area in danger to fire his Meteor. The punishment from the heavens dealt a heavy blow to the devils as their ladders and forces were left in shambles. His might was lacking when compared to going wild with Fal Garaz, but to the dwarves watching the scene, it was a refreshing blow; like a nourishing rain from the sky falling on land as dry as a bone.

“What is that?! Take out that human!”

The Barloq wearing the white gold helmet pointed his finger with a sharp nail toward Sungchul’s direction as he shouted his order. A portion of the winged devils that had been roaming above the battlefield broke off to head toward Sungchul’s direction.

There were six in all. It may appear like a small number, but to an average person, this was more than enough for the task. These devils known as Raptor Gargoyles were known for their peerless prowess in close quarter combat, and also, their naturally high vitality which made them highly effective against mages that had comparably terrible endurance.

The Raptor Gargoyles flapped their hideous bat-like wings to overwhelm Sungchul as they brandished their Scythes threateningly.

“Die, human!”

The dwarves looked on with expressions of concern from their fortress wall. In their eyes, Sungchul’s life looked to be in peril like a candle before the storm, but when the Devils rushed forward, countless streams of light burst out from the man’s fingertip causing the devils to be burned away in an instant. The dwarves let out a cheer. It was a scene that was difficult to believe even as they witnessed it. A Cosmomancer, who were known to have notoriously poor melee capabilities, was overcoming Raptor Gargoyles, who were famous for their fearsome strength in close quarters, with what appeared to be simple magic.

“ ... ”

The secret was in Sungchul's hidden class.

[Echo – 2]

It would be pitifully lacking to kill the winged devil – gargoyle with a single casting of glare regardless of the number of times the spell had been empowered. However, what if Echo which was the basic ability of the legendary class Echo Mage was combined with Sungchul's superhuman dynamic visual acuity and meticulous precision? The synergy between the three aspects produced a destructive might beyond a mere 3 castings of glare. The Raptor Gargoyles that were known to be 'Nightmares of Close Quarter Combat' fell out of the skies as their weaknesses such as mouth, neck, and eyes were showered with beams of light at the same time.

“Hm Hm. 18 shots of Glare used. It's probably a good idea to deduct at least 3 shots of the remaining Meteor!”

When Bertelgia began to shout haughtily, Sungchul looked down at the Devil's forces and spoke in a firm voice.

“How many shots remaining?”

“Can’t you at least count that much?”

“My mind is getting rusty with age.”

“More like you think it’s too annoying!”

“...”

“15 shots of Meteors in reserve!”

Sungchul calmed his breathing and looked down at the battlefield once more. There were still countless devil armies awaiting below the castle walls. Even with all 15... no, hundreds of shots of Meteor, it would still be difficult to get rid of all of them. Sungchul’s sights turned toward the Hell Siege Engines that exuded fearsome presences in between the Devil armies.

‘If I can destroy those, the capabilities of the devil army would be brought down a peg or two.’

Sungchul concentrated his gaze on the Hell Siege Engines that had a form similar to a giant scorpion and began to chant the Aria in his head. He recited the activation phrase in his mind as indescribably complex intricacies of the spell flowed like a song through his consciousness.

‘Meteor.’

Another magical formation appeared in the sky, and a blue meteor fell toward the devil army through the formation. Its target was the Hell Siege Engine.

A green flame tailed behind the blue meteor as it fell slightly short of the Hell Siege Engine that had been knocking on the castle walls, but there was no need to recite a second casting. It was enough to simply let the mana continue to flow after the incantation of the spell. Another meteor soon fell toward the same target after the first that had landed near the Hell Siege engine.

[Echo – 1]

The meteor managed to land on top of the Hell Siege Engine. The waist of the giant scorpion snapped like a shrimp before it caused a massive explosion of fearsome blue flames.

“Sweet! This is how we do it!”

Bertelgia exploded into cheer as she watched the flames shoot up into the sky like fireworks. The battle was not over yet.

Sungchul had only managed to rid himself of a single siege weapon among 3. He immediately turned toward another Hell Siege Engine and began his incantation, but the devils were not going to simply watch it happen.

“Every winged unit go tear that human to shreds!”

It might have been the simplest solution to personally deal with the problem at hand, but the Commanders of the Devil Army tended to sit back and order around their inferiors. The Barloq commanding the Devil Army did not step up, and instead, commanded all of his aerial forces under him toward the Mage on the mountain peak.

Hell Siege Engines were infamous for their heavy plating and fire power, but it couldn't withstand an assault of Meteor. Dozens of winged devils put the skies littered with green sparks behind them and charged at Sungchul. The Dwarves who were watching this did not just stand by.

“Let us help that man! He is our savior!”

The fortress surged with life once again and began to spit out terrifying artillery fire with the beating of drums. From ballista to grape shots, a variety of weapons were deployed toward the flying devils, and the devils that were caught within their web of fire were torn apart mid-air. Only a few of them managed to survive the attack.

“Come inside, Bertelgia.”

Sungchul, after collecting Bertelgia, postured himself as though he was snowboarding and began sliding down the mountain slope. The devils that were led by the Raptor Gargoyles began to dive toward him, but their timing was awry causing them to miss by a

narrow margin which forced them to ascend once again.

The devils began to gain a better feel for the timing and dove toward Sunghcul once again. Sungchul took a look at his pursuers and struck the ground with his iron sword as they approached. Fragments of rock shot out like buckshots and became embedded into the face and eyes of the pursuing devils.

“Kiiii!!”

One of the devils that had become a bloody mess flew past Sungchul and tumbled down the mountain. Another devil aimed for the front this time, but Sungchul lifted his finger and used Glare to take care of it. The devil that was struck with the unavoidable beam of light in both his eyes and mouth began to smoke from his mouth. It died instantly and crashed onto a rock that Sungchul passed by.

Sungchul peeked back once again. There were 5 remaining. However, he didn't notice the presence of any tracking magic, and they were no longer visible from the battlefield as well. Now, he had no reason to hold back anymore.

Sungchul who had been riding along the steep slope of the mountain put his foot down on the ground. His rapid descent came to an abrupt stop.

The devils that had been circling Sungchul's vicinity felt suspicious regarding his sudden movements, but they also felt that it was an opportunity and immediately rushed toward him.

Unfortunately, the consequences of opposing Sungchul who had no reason to restrain his strength was dire. He did not use magic or weapons as he gripped the devils with just his hands and grated their faces against the rocky surface of the mountain. A devil that had lost his comrades tried to escape as it was stricken with fear, but a stone from behind struck the back of his head causing it to pop like a grape.

“Nice shot!”

“...”

After ridding himself of the devils, Sungchul hid his presence this time and stepped back onto the tall peak in stealth. The tide of battle had changed.

When 2 of the 3 Hell Siege Engines were destroyed, the dwarven firepower reignited causing the devils to be pushed back. The final hell siege engine tried to continue on with the assault, but it was focused down and destroyed by the dwarven artillery. The devils had to retreat leaving behind nothing but countless corpses as the sun began to set.

Sungchul revealed himself to the dwarves who were cleaning the battlefield. They immediately recognized him and began to surround him with cheer.

“We are truly grateful, unknown Mage!”

“If not for you, we’d have truly died out here!”

Sungchul looked at the dwarves surrounding him with a calm expression on his face. Stocky build with bushy beards. Every last one of them looked similar to one another, but thankfully, he didn’t find any recognizable faces among them.

“I am a wandering Mage. Call me Ahmuge.”

Sungchul introduced himself without reserve.

Chapter 96 – Order Of The Iron Blood Knights (3)

Sungchul was able to meet the commissioned officers in command ranks at the dwarven fortress. Kevan Kemaal's commander of defenses, Kaal Bomba, was among them. A gruff voice with large hands the size of pot lids. The dwarf had bright eyes that lit up like lanterns as he briefed the room of the current situation while gulping down a large mug full of beer.

Bomba himself wasn't quite sure how the Devil Army managed to ambush them from the rear, but he knew of recent rumors from the frontlines of the Demon Realm.

"I've heard rumors that the Order of the Iron Blood Knights requested reinforcements from Lord Martin. Not to mention, the Order was already in quite a poor shape from the continued assault from the Devil Army all throughout the winter. In any case, the Order of the Iron Blood Knights put aside their pride and asked several times for reinforcements, but the bastard Lord Marquis ignored their plea each time. It was only a matter of time before they fell."

"..."

Sungchul knew all too well what kind of man Martin Breggas truly was. He was certainly a man who did as he liked, but he was not a man so irresponsible to neglect his responsibilities without reason.

Another dwarf opened his mouth.

“I suppose the rumors are true after all. The rumor that he decided to use the Iron Blood Knights as sacrificial lambs to elevate a bastard son of his, from a beloved mistress, as his rightful heir.”

“That rumor. I’d like to hear more about it,” said Sungchul who suddenly showed a bit more interest.

When the man they were indebted to that was silent all this time suddenly spoke up, the attention of the dwarves shifted all at once towards Sungchul. The dwarf who had been speaking took a few more swigs of his drink before speaking again with a belch.

“Martin Breggas looks like a person, but on the inside, his head is nothing more than a dog in heat trying to sow his seed into every beauty he lays his eyes on. This disgusting habit allowed him a lot of progeny, but even the Marquis himself probably doesn’t know how many bastards he has.”

The others began to laugh along and kept up with the banter.

“I’ve heard that the conservative estimate goes over 20.”

“What’s 20 kids? I’ve heard there are more than a 100.”

Sungchul recalled Sophia Breggas’s final smile, she who died so tragically.

‘Did that kid also come from a mistress?’

He had coincidentally seen the genealogy of the Breggas family upon one of his returns from the Demon Realm. He had seen Elijah’s name from the genealogy that recorded everyone from the founder to the current successor of the family name in the seemingly endless branches of the family tree, but he had never seen Sophia’s name. For her name to not be recorded on the genealogy meant that she was not formally a part of the family.

“The problem is...”

The dwarf who had been speaking suddenly shouted in a loud voice to clear the air. When the rumbling around him began to calm down, he spoke on.

“The problem is that, even among the countless number of progenies, there is a single one that he favors! He loves that child enough to throw away the child he had with his own wife in the Demon Realm.”

“Who is that?” asked Sungchul.

“Parlim Dargot. A High Elf. He’s the child from a dancer of some renown in Trowyn. There is actually another rumor regarding that bastard.”

“Oh?”

When Sungchul showed a bit of interest, the dwarf gave a toothy smile and lowered his voice.

“That the progeny that Martin adores so much might not actually be his own... Kehahaha!”

The dwarf seemed to have found the rumor so hilarious that he didn't manage to finish his own story before bursting into laughter. The other dwarfs laughed along in mockery of Martin.

When the laughter bursting from every seam of the hall died down, the storytime continued. But the speaker this time was not a dwarf, but the commander sent by Kevan Kemaal, Kaal Bomba.

“In any case, the rumor is that Martin is trying to make this progeny his heir. The man has no scruples and has already driven his wives and all of his other sons to their death. But even that impudent man thinks it's unreasonable to make a bastard child of a dancer with no basis for the inheritance to become his legal heir. So he is preparing a sacrificial lamb.”

“Are you talking about the Order of the Iron Blood Knights?”

Kaal nodded at Sungchul's inquiry.

“I'm sure they knew about it too. It was a popular rumor after all. But the Order has no strength. They couldn't even pull out their Knight-Captain's son that was summoned from that other world

through the Summoning Palace, so is there anything more to be said?”

Sungchul recalled Ahram’s dhole-like face as the dwarf was talking.

‘The one who killed that kid was me. If I wasn’t involved, Ahram would have graduated from the Palace and gotten accepted into the Order.’

Every action has a consequence. Out of the many possible outcomes, there was bound to be a few that were outside of expectations. It appeared that Ahram’s death had been the final blow to the Order of the Iron Blood Knights, and a declining house was bound to collapse quickly.

Sungchul tipped his glass as he contemplated on the stories he had heard today.

—

The Order of the Iron Blood Knights was a military organization composed of the Summoned, especially those summoned from Korea. The Knights, with the Knight-Captain Sungtek at the head, were nothing more than a band of mercenaries until they positioned themselves within the Demon Frontlines that was known to be the most dangerous region and fought against powerful Devils with their lives on the line.

As the danger grows, so does the rewards. Their struggles looked fruitless, but in reality, the Order experienced massive growth. Starting from the Knight-Captain Sungtek, a few dozen under him quickly exceeded the realm of Superhuman, and they began calling themselves Iron Blood. This was the humble beginnings of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights that rose to the position of top three most powerful factions in all of the continent including the northern region. However, the Order that had been on the fast track no longer existed.

Sungtek might have been strong-handed in his formation of the organization, but he showed weakness in his ability to maintain such a massive group. Between schemers such as Martin Breggas, Aquiroa, and the Emperor, his organization was taken advantage of and discarded.

There was news spreading throughout the fortress of the Storm Battlefront that even the final bastion of the Order had been relinquished.

“The Order of the Iron Blood Knights have fallen.”

“The Fortress of the Iron Blood Cross was forfeited, and the few that remain have given themselves to Martin Breggas.”

“The Eastern Front of the Demonic Battlefront is completely abandoned.”

“It’ll only be a matter of time before the Storm Battlefront is overrun.”

Sungchul who had been staying within the Dwarven Fortress as a guest of honor could hear all of their gossips. They all contained grim and vital news. As people's concerns seemed to grow heavier, a unit of Wyvern Knights entered the fortress. They delivered the command of Martin Breggas to Kaal Bomba even after returning with all manner of injuries after an attack en route.

Main force led personally by Martin Breggas is moving to strike at the Devil's main force. All subordinate officers that see this news are expected to dispatch all forces except the bare minimum to maintain the line.

‘So, he ended up moving personally. Martin Breggas.’

This was the worst crisis since the formation of the Demon Realm Battlefront. There had been several of them big and small throughout, but there had been none that threatened its total destruction such as now. There was no way for Martin to keep out of the thick of it any longer.

There was news that an army from the Elven Tribal Alliance of Varan-Aran that had been defending the west was now marching east toward the region overseen by the Storm Battlefront. Kaal also decided to send out every unit other than the injured and a few veteran soldiers to the east. Sungchul joined Kaal's army as an honorary mage.

The Dwarven Army sang marching tunes as they held lengthy spears five times their height while heading out to the land of

death. There was a marching tune related to Sungchul.

“Fucking Sungchul~ Return Fal Garaaz~ You Son of a Whore~
Sungchul the Eunuch~ Give Back Fal Garaz~ Shit of the World~”

There was even a second verse. This was a widely known truth, but Sungchul was the first entry within the Dwarven Book of Grudges. If Sungchul revealed his identity at the current moment, it would most certainly lead to all the dwarves turning against him.

“Man... you have a lot of enemies. Do you... have any friends?”

Bertelgia shook from laughter as she spoke from her pocket.

“ ... ”

Sungchul didn't respond. Instead, he pulled her out of his pocket and tossed her onto the floor.

“Ouch! You're too much! Really!”

The dwarves that saw Bertelgia fly, shouted in wonder. The day passed by like this, and they finally arrived at some village. It was already in ruins by the hands of the Devils. Sungchul discovered the half-burnt sign of the village within the ashen wreckage. It was written in Korean which he hadn't seen since he arrived to the Other World.

[[신 파주](#)]

신 파주-new [Paju](#), a military city created to defend Seoul.

The context is, this region is under threat by North Korea and is always on alert for an invasion from the North. Meaning this is how the Iron Blood Knights felt this village was like (border with Demon Realm)

“ ... ”

Sungchul and the dwarves could smell the faint stench of blood permeating throughout the village as they entered. There was a disgusting construct left behind by the Devils who hadn't left a single structure standing. It was a tower of stacked humans. Men and women of all ages seemed to have gone through some atrocious torture before being used as material for the tower while they still held their breath only to die upon it.

Those that died defending the village appeared to have been eaten by the Devils. The corpse of a warrior that had been hollowed out of internal organs was left rotting on a dining table.

“...those damned devils.”

The dwarves had become calloused to the gore, but atrocities performed onto civilians were revolting to a different level.

‘The entire continent will be subjected to this Calamity if the

front line of the demon realm is breached.'

Sungchul resolved himself with this thought as he knew the devils better than anyone else. Humans were food and playthings to the devils, and the two could only be eternally at odds. There was also no need for diplomacy or negotiations with devils.

Kaal Bomba's march had slowed, perhaps due to the pitiful scene of the village.

Sungchul's group managed to see the fluttering flag of Martin Breggas after two days had passed. The military flag with the image of a winged skeleton holding a sword was visible from far away. Under that flag were several hundred other flags, representing roughly thirty thousand soldiers. A diverse army from various battlefronts and from all over the continent had gathered in one location.

The largest and the most central of the forces were the militia of Trowyn lead by Falim Dagott known as the progeny of Martin Breggas. Sungchul could see that the group was only a militia in name, and they didn't fall behind any of the knight's orders in equipment or number after a single glance.

Parlim Dargot was a handsome man with a confident and charismatic demeanor. He didn't share any resemblance with Martin as the rumors said, but he had a large presence that seemed to draw the eyes of every person near or far. It was a far contrast from Elijah who was similarly handsome yet lacked strength and leadership.

Parlim sought out every captain from various regions and introduced himself while discussing his unit's size and role with a confident and concise manner.

“Hmm. That's the rival of the kid that turned into a High Devil? Honestly, this guy's a lot better.”

Bertelgia was in agreement with Sungchul's opinion.

On the other hand, the Order of the Iron Blood Knights that occupied a corner of the army looked incomparably pathetic. Sungtek, who once wielded the might of one of the top factions of the continent, looked haggard and had little presence as he kept to his little corner of the army with his surviving soldiers. No one showed any respect toward the group.

Those that were aware of the ongoings of the Demon Realm Battlefront sympathized with them, but those that were blind to the situation scorned them as the incompetent Order that relinquished their front causing their current predicament.

‘Sungtek Cho.’

Sungchul knew the man personally. The man had been a brave and lively leader of great ability before the Calamity had struck. He was once bolder and more driven than even Sungchul, but Sungchul could see none of the spark of the past in Sungtek's current appearance. All that was left of the man was an aged husk.

‘So the Order of the Iron Blood Knights have fallen this far.’

There was only one reason for the Order’s fall. They had stood against the Calamity. Many had deemed the Calamity as minor and insignificant, but the Order of the Iron Blood Knights had withered away as a result of weathering against it. They were unlikely to stand tall ever again.

These were Sungchul’s thoughts as he left the area.

Sungchul then looked around to check for anyone familiar. There was only a small minority of people that were aware of Sungchul’s current appearance, but if he were to meet any of them, he would be greatly troubled. Thankfully, he didn’t find Deckard or anyone from the Suicide Unit. This meant that Sungchul could act as Ahmuge Kim for the moment.

‘Everything should reach a conclusion within a week. If the humans were to lose this battle, then a third of the population living in the continent would fall prey to the horns and claws of the devils.’

Powerful nations such as the Human Empire might be able to withstand the devil’s invasion, but the minor nations would be helpless against them. The image of the ruined village flashed by Sungchul’s eyes.

A shallow sigh escaped his lips.

‘If my Intuition only managed to get a single point higher.’

As he turned around with regret lingering in his mind, someone grabbed his shoulder. Shock spread through Sungchul’s eyes.

‘I couldn’t feel the presence?!’

It was impossible. For someone to have intruded on Sungchul’s transcendent senses that is. However, there were several situations in the past where this had happened. Sungchul felt a sense of déjà vu as he faced the woman that held his shoulder with a frosty glare.

“Oh, it really was you! Mr. Sungchul.”

The identity of the woman smiling wide with her teeth showing was none other than Ahmuge.

Chapter 97 – Facing Them Alone

‘Why did this woman turn up in a place like this?’

Sungchul didn’t show it, but he was quite startled. Sujin Lee the Regressor. They had a one of a kind meeting during their time in the Summoning Palace, but he felt that she was a dead woman walking as that was the fate that awaited all Regressors. However, the Sujin that he met now was healthy and overflowing with vitality. The attire she wore wasn’t some ragged thing for commoners, but quite a proper gear for adventurers.

“You haven’t changed one bit, have you?”

Sujin laughed with her eyes as she spoke. It appeared as though she was overjoyed to have met Sungchul.

“...What happened?”

Sungchul took a quick look at his surroundings before asking the question. He was especially careful of the dwarves as the name Sungchul was pretty much considered a taboo among them.

“What do you mean?”

“... Let’s move locations.”

Sungchul dragged Sujin with an innocent expression on her face

toward one end of the barracks. At the end of the encampment, a vast expanse of wasteland could be seen past it where giant grassy tumbleweed rolled by. In this place with little human presence, Sungchul briefly asked Sujin politely about her days after their split. Sujin replied in a hushed voice after putting aside her warm smile.

“I joined the Assassin’s Guild.”

“The Assassin’s Guild...?”

The inexplicably vacant eyes of his former companion, Shamal Rajput, came to his mind.

“How did you enter the Assassin’s Guild? Those guys wouldn’t have left a Regressor alone.”

“I have my ways, but it seems that you are already aware of how Regressors are normally treated.”

Sujin retorted with a mischievous expression her face.

“...”

“I was kidding. Anyways, how are things on your end? How did you end up in this hell hole?”

Sujin quickly changed topics. Sungchul firmly pressed upon the

thrashing Bertelgia to quiet her before replying with a calm voice.

“I am here to participate in the battle that holds the fate of the World at stake.”

Another smile appeared on Sujin’s lips.

“As expected you came to save the world. It surely is appropriate for the one that shares names with the one who must not be named.”

“More importantly, why are YOU here? Did the Assassin’s Guild send you to join this fight?”

“Who knows.”

“This battlefield should be too much for a Summoned who’s not even been around for a year to handle, isn’t it?”

“I’m not strictly here to fight. It’d be more appropriate to say that I’m here to test my luck.”

Sujin let out a sigh as she stared off into space.

“To test your luck?”

“That’s right. I am being tested whether the future I’ve seen is

correct or not. It turns out that being a Regressor isn't all hugs and kisses."

"Of course. They are beings who destabilize the timeline. They must pay the cost."

The future isn't predetermined. The minor details that the Regressors had seen were bound to be altered. The problem was that the results were often contrary to what the Regressors had hoped for.

When their existence was discovered, the Regressors fell to a state where they were unable to impact the world in any significant way. Of course, nobody knew anything about the Regressors who came before Regression became widely known. Sungchul had a bad impression toward Regressors, and he did not trust the futures they had seen. It was for these reasons that Sungchul did not ask anything regarding the future.

Sujin who noticed his disinterest took a step closer to ask the question herself.

"Aren't you curious? Don't you want to know what future I'm here to test?"

"Not particularly."

"Try to guess."

It was in this moment that Bertelgia let out another powerful struggle. Sungchul calmed her once again before opening his mouth with his eyes trained on Sujin.

“Are you predicting the results of the battle to come?”

Sujin shook her head.

“Boo-Boo-”

“What a strange sound effect.”

“Regardless of how strange the sound was, you’re still wrong.”

“Then what are you here to test?”

Sujin took a deep breath and looked over the distance in response to Sungchul’s question. Her eyes that had been filled with joy was now filled with dark clouds of concern. She allowed a brief moment to pass before she spoke in a quiet voice followed by a sigh.

“He will appear here.”

Sungchul’s pupils turned toward Sujin, and she continued in a firm voice.

“The Enemy of the World. That is the future that I had seen, and the future that will soon come to pass.”

Sujin left it at that. She had said that Sungchul would turn into the very Calamity that ends up destroying the world. Sungchul had lightly ignored her words and forgotten about it entirely, but Sujin was testing his resolve once again on their second meeting. It wasn't clear whether this was her intention, but Sungchul couldn't help but feel indescribably uneasy. An uncomfortable silence continued on.

“...”

When Sungchul became silent, Sujin wore an awkward smile before speaking on vaguely.

“Well... if this doesn't come to pass, I'll be passed off as a cheat and be eliminated by the Assassin's Guild. I am being watched as a result.”

Sujin looked behind her with a fleeting glance. Sungchul could feel his presence as well. It was a faint presence that had been lingering in a single location since a while back. He could feel that presence walking toward them now. It was an unwelcome presence of a familiar person that was approaching him. His face was entirely covered with a dark turban, but nothing could be hidden from Sungchul's eyes.

‘Is it that assassin that I met back at Airfruit?’

It was the final survivor of the Almeira Family of Assassins that had fought against Sungchul during the battle of Airfruit; Kaz Almeira.

The young man who Sungchul had believed that he had split in half was wearing a distinct mantle which covered his entire arm from the shoulder.

‘I ended up allowing him to live by trying to let him die in agony.’

Whatever the reason, it was an opponent Sungchul did not wish to face. Sungchul kept his back toward the assassin as he walked forward and said,

“Let us part here.”

Sujin was not quite warmed up to Kaz as well. She quietly nodded before whispering under her breath.

“If opportunity strikes, let us meet again. I would like to eat another meal made by your hands. The people from the Assassin’s Guild has terrible palates.”

“If there is an opportunity.”

The two parted in different directions. Both of their faces didn’t look well as they walked in their individual direction, but Sungchul’s expression was a shade darker.

“ ... ”

The man who had never once doubted himself calmed his turbulent heart as he looked out toward the dry wilderness.

—

The armies of the Devils appeared onto the wilderness. It was an overwhelming army that enveloped the horizon in darkness. One scouting party with a wyvern knight at the head took on the danger to gather the general information about the Devil army. According to the scouting party, the Devil army that was approaching the last line of defense of the Demon Realm frontline was nearing a hundred thousand soldiers in total. It was almost 3 times the 35 thousand soldiers gathered for the Human Allied Coalition, but even then their morale was at its peak with the desire to drive out the intruding Devils in this upcoming battle. It was because they knew that their loss would turn this land into the playground of these Devils.

Head Commander Martin Breggas chose the entrance of Trowyn, the Harupaya Ridge, to deploy his army and wait for the demons to arrive. It was an ideal topography that was easy to defend and permit supplies and reinforcements to arrive from the back. Albeit, there was no room for retreat if they lost. There were fertile farmlands, bountiful hamlets, and cities scattered just beyond Harupaya Ridge. If the ridge were to fall, the devil army would flood in like the tide and destroy everything in sight. Despite the fate of half of the continent being staked upon this moment, Martin's thoughts wandered to something completely unrelated.

“The upcoming battle tomorrow shall be the stage for your glamorous debut. You will hold the most important role, so be brave but don’t be careless in battle.”

Martin spoke in a soft voice toward the son that held all of his affection.

“I understand, Lord Marquis.”

“I would like it if you could call me father the next time we meet.”

“I was thinking the same thing, sir.”

Martin gazed proudly at Parlim’s dependable backside as he left. It was only after Parlim had left that Martin began to stare deeply into the map of the battlefield located at the center of the barrack.

‘How should I set the stage for Parlim to really shine.’

The matter of victory was a problem, but for Martin, the most concerning matter was the portion that Parlim would play in the victory. He modified the formation of dispatch countless times and drew out the scene of the battle in his head. After several trial and error, Martin discovered the ideal deployment that would allow Parlim to display his fullest. However, it was only natural to give something up in order to gain what he wanted. He needed the sacrifice of another for his plan to work. It was up to him to choose

who that sacrificial lamb would be.

Out of the countless pieces on the map of the battlefield, a single one stuck out in Martin's eyes like magic. A satisfied smile appeared on his lips.

‘The Order of the Iron Blood Knights seem perfect. They are desperate to restore their name more than anyone else, and the more I consider it, the more ideal it seems. I get to rid myself of the roots of that Order that was a thorn in my eye, and I get to make good use of them for a final time.’

He chose to dispatch the Order of the Iron Blood Knights toward the right wing where the attack was expected to be the heaviest. The only problem was whether Sungtek would accept his request. People expected Sungtek to refuse, due to his ongoing conflict with Martin. Therefore, Martin had been working on coming up with a pretext to enforce compliance in case Sungtek caused a fuss.

Surprisingly, Sungtek relented to the order without a word in complaint. It was a peaceful resolution that no one had expected. Martin sent praise to Sungtek for the courageous decision along with a meager sum of gold as a gift, using the excuse that it was a bonus reward. That looked to be the end of the situation at hand, but that was when the real problem began.

“We no longer have anything to lose.”

Sungtek had a plan prepared in secret. He wore a complacent smile as he looked toward the wilderness to the north where the

army of the devils was situated. The Demon army was now almost upon them.

—

In some place a short distance away from the battlefield, several individuals were watching from the darkness.

“To give such credit to the words of some Regressor. Did your skills rust after spending so much time in that dark and musky place, Shamal Rajput?”

The grating voice of an old woman tore through the stillness and rang out. It was an elderly woman who donned a deep dark blue robe adorned with specks of gold wearing a mask covered in indecipherable letters. The woman with an extraordinary presence was Aquiroa the Executor. She was someone veiled in mystery, exerting great influence in the shadows as a major force of this era as the Second Champion of the Continent. It was difficult to recognize her due to the mask, but it was plenty obvious from her voice and movement that she was anxious. Her gloved emaciated fingers pointed toward a young woman in a corner.

“Tell me, Regressor. Is it even true that the Enemy of the World will reveal himself here?”

The identity of the woman singled out by the champion was none other than Sujin Lee. She nodded her head and spoke with a firm voice without a single hesitation.

“The Enemy of the World will show up in the battle of Harupaya Ridge.”

Hearing her words, Aquiroa snorted in jest

.

A man in another corner opened his mouth.

“This Regressor predicted the appearance of the Enemy of the World in Airfruit.”

It was an indifferent voice without a shred of emotion. The speaker whose vacant gray eyes seemed to merge seamlessly with the surrounding darkness, was the Fifth Champion of the Continent Shamal Rajput. He was the Leader of the Assassin’s Guild whose name was feared by everyone living.

“And, if her prediction matches up once again, we will have justification to believe this Regressor’s words.”

Shamal spoke as such and melded back into the shadows. Executor Aquiroa turned to face Ahmuge.

“Then I’ll ask this. Will Sungchul be the Calamity that destroys us?”

Sujin nodded in reply.

“That is nonsense. How can someone like Sungchul become a

Calamity? I can take care of someone of that caliber all by myself. He was trying to resolve the Calamity, but even though he was cast out, he has still yet to take care of one measly Demon King.”

Each one of her words stabbed at her like daggers, but Sujin’s eyes did not falter as she withstood Aquiroa’s forceful words. Sujin looked at her directly in the eyes as she spoke in clear words.

“The Sungchul I have seen is no longer human.”

“What did you say?”

“He had become some existence in between man and deity.”

Aquiroa who had heard this was frightened out of her wits.

“You...You’re saying he became a Lesser God?!”

The man who was wordlessly standing by a corner with a sword in hand looked toward their direction. He was a well-balanced knight with a full suit of armor and a helmet that couldn’t be peered into. The world called him the Vagabond King instead of his title as the Third Champion of the Continent.

“Let us just assume Sungchul will actually appear here. What will he do next?”

The Vagabond King asked Sujin.

‘This man... is THAT Vagabond King?’

She barely managed to answer as an eerie sensation of her body being stripped naked flooded her senses.

“He kills the Demon King. Without anyone’s assistance.”

Chapter 98 – Facing Them Alone (2)

“I will not believe those words.”

Aquiroa’s words were filled with disgust. A chilling light flashed within the dark interior of the Vagabond King’s helmet.

“But, what will you do if that Regressor’s words turn out to be true?”

A soft, but unrefusable words flowed out from within the helmet.

“Shouldn’t we take measures?”

Shamal replied.

“Measures? Such as?”

When the Vagabond King asked, Shamal looked over at Aquiroa the Executor. She remained silent for a brief moment before stating,

“Whether that girl’s words are true or not, we must stop Sungchul if he appears here.”

“How do you plan on stopping him, Aquiroa?”

The Vagabond King spoke while flashing his eyes once again.

Aquiroa fixed her mask and spoke formally in her grating voice with strength behind her words.

“As long as the Demon King does not die, the Calamity will be halted at the first level. At a level that can be managed by us. We have seen that my thoughts were in the right during the past eight years. The viability of our plan has already been demonstrated. We must not allow the status quo we’ve worked so hard to maintain to be shaken, your majesty.”

Aquiroa observed strict formality unlike when she was dealing with Shamal.

The Vagabond King let out a heavy sigh before asking again.

“Are you trying to tell me that it is possible to delay the Calamity? And yet some people say that the Calamity cannot be stopped or delayed. What do you have to say about this?”

“Heathens that call themselves as the Order of the End have said those exact words. However, what do those heathens know? They are fallen people that have scattered and resorted to thieving, prostitution, and begging as they failed to predict their own fates and lost their land and crown. There is no need to take heed to a single utterance of their words.”

She became a bit excited, but her words continued without

faltering and with powerful strength throughout.

“If the honored lady’s thoughts are so, then I have nothing more to add.”

The Vagabond King spoke as such and did not open his mouth again.

When the individual she was most careful with had turned silent, Aquiroa got the opportunity to speak her mind without any interruptions.

“If Sungchul appears in this area, we’ll use everything to take care of him.”

“If killing him is impossible?”

Shamal suddenly tossed out his question to which Aquiroa let out a soft laughter.

“Not that it would happen, but if that becomes the case, we must at least protect THAT from him.”

Sujin felt unease at Aquiroa’s tone.

“And that is?”

When Shamal followed up with a question, Sujin's unease hit its peak, and Aquiroa's blunt answer confirmed her suspicions.

“Protect him. The Demon King Hesthnus Max.”

—

When dawn broke, the full might of the Devil Army that had been veiled in darkness was revealed. The Devils had the numbers to envelop the horizon from end to end. The sight of hell siege engines and the gigantic towering monsters were intimidating to behold. The soldiers positioned on top of the hill began to murmur when they saw the grand army of the devils.

“Look over there, it's a variant of Tam Tam! It looks as terrifying as it is described in ancient texts.”

“Is that the Hell Siege Engine that is their main weapon of war? It's larger and scarier than I had imagined it.”

“There's also juvenile Sea Demons. If the babies are that huge, I can't even grasp how large their adults are.”

The soldiers reacted with curiosity rather than fear. The morale of the allied forces commanded by Martin Breggas was so high that it could pierce the clouds. More importantly, an important mission weighed on their shoulders; the sacred mission of protecting one's home and family.

The Army gathered under the banner represented every spare warrior from the front lines of the Demon Realm and its neighboring territories. If Harupaya Ridge were to fall, then let alone Trowyn, the territories of Storm Battlefront and the Elven Tribal Alliance of Varan-Aran which neighbored the ridge would also be in immediate danger. The Elves and Dwarves that have lived on their land for thousands of years burned with a greater sense of duty than the humans.

“Victory or death.”

Sungchul had to hear this phrase being repeated hundreds of times as he roamed about the dwarven barracks.

A steady stream of new updates was brought by the scouts to this location. Currently, the Devil that commanded the Demon Army was not the Demon King Hesthnius, but a High Devil below him known as Prontorowa. He was a commander whose rank wasn't particularly high, being ranked 8th, but he was ancient even among the devils. He had lived for tens of thousands of years, so he was said to be a cunning devil well versed in vile black magic and military strategy.

Martin's headquarters had determined that the devil itself was not a strong combatant, but it more than made up for it with abundant experience with commanding large-scale operations, making it an especially tricky enemy to deal with.

Sungchul was lingering around Martin's tent; gathering all of the needed information.

‘Prontorowa. It looks like he wasn’t there during the last attack on the Demon King’s Palace.’

If this devil had been there, he couldn’t have been here. Sungchul had killed every devil in sight during that assault.

Whatever the case, the good news was that the upcoming battle on Harupaya Ridge seemed to be slightly in favor of the humans. Their numbers were three times lower than their opposition, but they held the advantageous terrain along with seasoned troop with high morale. The desires of Martin who stood as their leader was also quite high. His selfish desire to have his favored offspring hoard the merits stood out, but it was undeniable that the man desired victory overall. He personally oversaw various parts of the battle line to inspect the deployment and the state of soldiers and used a pittance from his own pockets to rile up their morale.

The civil militia led by Martin’s child also had unexpectedly high combat potential. It didn’t quite meet up to the Order of the Iron Blood Knights in their heydays, but they had a number of powerful warriors that could hope to meet up to those standards. If they were placed in the right place at the right time, they had the potential to change the flow of battle in a single moment.

‘It looks like Ahmuge’s prediction won’t come to pass.’

Ahmuge’s predictions were something he passed through one ear and out the other, but it couldn’t be completely ignored. Regressors tend to speak of uncertain futures, but it was

undeniable that the future they had seen was one of many that could unfold. Fortunately, if the battle would continue at this rate, then Sungchul would not have to reveal himself here.

Sungchul estimated that the human faction had over 70% chance of victory. Even if they did not win, they would not suffer a defeat as the devils would have incurred a large enough casualty to make any further invasion impossible. In other words, it meant that he had no reason to step up whether they win or lose. That is, as long as nothing exceptional happened that could cause the frontline to fall apart.

Meanwhile, Sungchul's division was stationed at the left flank where the terrain was particularly rough.

Sungchul's unit had been dispatched toward the left flank of Harapuya ridge where it was especially dangerous. The dwarves who were especially skilled in mountain battle formed the main front line of the left flank, and a great many of their famous siege artillery were fielded. And to combat possible assault by air, many units of Elven bowmen were likewise deployed with the Dwarves. Sungchul was planning on giving his all as the guest mage, Ahmuge Kim, during this battle.

‘It should be enough if I destroy about 10 Hell Siege Engines.’

Firepower superiority over the left side should be decided with that amount.

Sungchul had a light heart as he waited for the battle. He utilized

the leftover time to practice Alchemy as he had always done in an effort to raise his Intuition and walked up and down the ridge with the dwarves to get familiarized with the nearby terrain.

The day of battle soon approached. A messenger from the devils came to Martin. It was a demand for surrender asking for passage through the region in return for a guarantee from the Demons that the surrounding regions will not be harmed. And as a bonus, the Demons offered to impart their knowledge of magic. Martin refused the offer without hesitation and prepared for battle. The Commander of each division relayed orders to prepare for battle.

The Defensive Unit of Kaal Bomba that Sungchul was affiliated with began to inspect their weapon and armor before standing along the battle line. Devils nearing a hundred thousand stood before them.

“There is a disgusting amount of them.”

“It looks like there’s more here than yesterday, or am I just seeing things?”

“It’s a good thing that there are more devils to kill.”

Dwarves swapped light hearted jokes as they put the final touches to their oversized crossbows and axes.

Elven archers stood behind the Dwarven Axemen. Contrary to the noisy dwarves, they calmly stood their ground and gauged the

strength and direction of the wind with their fingertips. The thundering voice of the Commander rang out in the distance. He was far away and on a different elevation making it difficult to understand what he was saying, but people knew that the voice belonged to the head commander of the allied forces, Martin Breggas.

Martin Breggas who stood behind the banner of a winged skull in flashy armor looked over his subordinates and began a speech to raise their spirits. It wasn't clear whether the speech had actually managed to raise their morale, but it at least appeared so on the outside.

The sound of the horn flute of the devils came next.

“Prepare for battle!”

The commands of the non-commissioned officers rang out in every direction with a slight delay.

‘Thud’

The dwarven axes moved in perfect order to form an axe-shield wall.

‘As expected of veteran soldiers polished through a hundred battles on the Demon Realm Frontlines. It would be impossible for the common devil to break through.’

Sungchul turned his gaze to look toward the commander situated below. The central unit that Martin was commanding was mainly composed of humans, and they were the core force of the allied forces made up of powerful mages experienced in battles big and small and veteran mercenaries hired from various regions. Behind Martin was his son, Parlim Dargott. The powerful Trowyn Civil Militia commanded by him was holding the ground as reserve forces. The central unit was the most powerful among the entire army.

The most concerning region was the right wing held by the Order of the Iron Blood Knights. They formed a defensive barrier composed of two unique fortresses said to have been made by taking apart ancient artifacts, but the number of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights were greatly diminished, and their morale had hit rock bottom. Sungchul held a great deal of suspicion regarding that topic.

‘Martin’s personality was the worst, but he is a man of great ability. Why did that man leave such an important right wing to that husk of a group?’

The way Sungchul saw it, it was only a matter of time before the Order of the Iron Blood Knights crumbled. They would endure until the end, but that would be just that. A story regarding Martin suddenly appeared in Sungchul’s mind.

‘Could it be? Did that bastard dispatch the Order of the Iron Blood Knights to their graves on purpose?’

The blades of the spear held by the civil militia of Trowyn

glistened in the sunlight as they stood behind the central unit. It was the moment that Martin's intentions connected clearly in Sungchul's mind.

He could feel a familiar feeling of revulsion in his stomach.

‘To use them as stepping stones even during a battle with the survival of humanity on the line.’

It wasn't only Martin Breggas. Those that held their vested interest in this land with a death grip made a choice no different than Martin.

Sungchul did not detest avarice or self-interest. Inversely, he believed that avarice and self-interest were the driving force of forward progress. It was just that those with power in Other World exceeded the bounds of greed. They had forsaken their duties and had repeatedly chosen options that benefited themselves. They didn't care how many died in the process. These were people that would offer up the entire world for their own security.

“...”

Sungchul's hatred of humanity that he had forgotten about began to bubble back up from the depth of his heart. He now had to question whether he should participate in the battle since the ones who would benefit the most from the battle would be Martin and his child. The faces of Sophia who had been abandoned by her own father and Elijah who would live out the rest of his life in eternal suffering entered his mind.

It was at that moment.

“What are you standing there frozen for, human friend?”

The dwarves including Kaal Bomba had surrounded Sungchul at one point.

“He couldn’t be stricken by fear, is he?”

“...”

“Well, there is no way someone of your calibre is scared, but an army of that size is enough to make one freeze, but don’t be so concerned.”

The dwarves marched forward past Sungchul.

“This land is our land and home. We will definitely protect this place with our blood and life.”

The reserved elves bowed toward Sungchul and followed after the dwarves. Sound of the horn flutes of the devils rang out toward the skies, and the Hell Siege Engine began to pour out fire. The battle had finally begun.

Sungchul calmed his momentarily turbulent heart as he stood beneath the banner that was fluttering in the strong gale flowing

along the top of the mountain's high points.

‘That’s right. I’m not fighting for my own benefit.’

Nausea and repulsion still swirled in his mouth, but Sungchul shrugged off those emotions and stepped confidently onto the battlefield.

“Bertelgia.”

“Yes!”

“I’ll leave the counting of Meteors to you once more.”

“Can’t you just fight with the hammer?”

“I can’t.”

Soon, meteors began to fall from the sky and mercilessly struck the Hell Siege Engines spewing green flames. Five of the Hell Siege Engines broke apart in moments due to Sungchul’s Meteor.

Cries of cheer echoed from every direction and the dwarven siege weapons spat out flames in response. Firepower superiority of the left-wing was being firmly grasped by the dwarves. Everything was proceeding smoothly.

As Sungchul thought this, there were some unexpected movements from the right-wing of the battlefield.

“It is now. My brothers. Let us deal proper punishment toward the traitors that turned their backs on us.”

The tip of the spears held by the Order of the Iron Blood Knights towards the direction of the devil army suddenly reversed. They were now faced towards none other than the army commanded by Martin Breggas.

Chapter 99 – Facing Them Alone (3)

Martin Breggas was struck by the betrayal of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights the hardest.

‘Sungtek Jo, did you finally go mad?’

Strategies that had been planned out with his heart and soul collapsed in a single moment. Putting aside Parlim’s glorious debut, he couldn’t even guarantee the victory. Martin trembled as he watched the tide of battle.

The Mobile Fortresses that the Order of the Iron Blood Knights boasted of were busily circling their eight massive legs toward his direction. The cannons that were densely packed onto the front face of the fortress were now facing his way.

“Fire!”

Dozens of cannons fired explosive shots at the same time toward the center unit when the officers shouted out the command. All that remained after the chaotic bombardment were countless corpses and the moaning of the injured.

The Devil Army joined forces with the Order at this time and broke through the right flank to head toward the side face of the center unit at a rapid pace. There was a face that Martin recognized well at the head of the charge.

“Martin Breggas! You fucking mutt! This will be your grave today!”

Knight-Captain of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights, Sungtek Jo. He stood at the head and was charging in this direction with the knights and devils. Martin’s thoughts momentarily went blank as he witnessed this scene. His thought process only managed to resume at the urgent cry of his advisor’s voice.

“Lord Marquis! A command! Give us a command!”

Martin kept the embarrassment of his momentary lapse in thought to himself before giving out a short command.

“We face them. Give the command to the Civil Militia of Trowyn. Tell them to punish those fucking traitors appropriately.”

Civil Militia of Trowyn lead by Farlim Dargot began to move. Their imposing armor and blade shone in the light as they marched toward the traitors. Sungtek noticed this was livid.

“Good! It’s the unit lead by that son of a bitch’s child!”

The spirit of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights burned as if on fire. Sungtek swung his blade as he rode on his large black steed. One young militia member raised his sword confidently to meet Sungtek’s blow. The victor was quickly decided after they crossed swords a few times.

“Kuwaaak!”

The young militiaman bled out as he fell. Sungtek snagged the fallen militia's body with a single arm, quickly slit his throat, and raised his body into the air.

“This will be the future of you bastards!”

Sungtek held the head that was dripping with blood in the air while the winged devils behind him flew past. They were the Barloqs wielding a flaming whip and sword. The morale of the civil militia plummeted when the very symbol of the demon army's might, the high rank devils, appeared. Their formation broke as they began to scatter.

“Everyone. Everyone calm yourselves! Please put your faith in me and follow me into battle!”

Parlim calmly tried to reassure his men, but they were a fresh unit without military tradition or history. It could have been different if the battle was in their favor, but their limitations were fully revealed as their current circumstances quickly grew dire. The civil militia ran away as the Barloqs approached with the Order of the Iron Blood Knights. Martin who saw this spectacle began to rack his brains with his mouth clenched shut.

‘I-I think there might be a way to turn this around... but the civil militia that I raised with such painstaking effort might suffer grave losses, and Parlim might not even be able to ascend the ranks. That's not profitable. In any case, this loss wasn't even due to my

mistake.'

Martin took in the sight of Suntek letting out a bellow in the distant battlefield with his faded blue eyes. He clenched his hand into a fist.

'It can't be helped.'

Martin looked around his surroundings and spoke with a pained voice.

"We give up Harupaya Ridge."

It was a response that the commanders could not believe. The entirety of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights might have betrayed them, and the civil militia might have fallen, but for the man that held the duty of protecting the Demon Realm Battlefront to renounce that duty once it became disadvantageous. It was a despicable conduct that couldn't be believed even as they witnessed it.

A few commanders who had a stronger sense of duty spoke their honest opinions.

"If you back from here now, even the Lord Marquis' territory will be devastated."

"If we turn away here, the northern territories will fall to the hands of the devils."

“We still hold the advantage on the left flank. There is still an opportunity to turn the tides.”

However, Martin wasn't listening. He had no desire to.

“If you people want to defend this place so badly, you all are welcome to do so.”

He tossed aside the baton prepared by the joint effort of rulers of several nations without a second thought and left the military tent. He shouted toward the advisers following behind him.

“Send word to Parlim Dargott. Keep the unit intact and immediately leave this place!”

He no longer paid any attention to how he looked toward the others, but he must have known how disgraceful his act was. He quietly called over his trusted adviser and secretly whispered into his ear.

“Immediately head to my residence in Trowyn and grab everything that holds value before escaping South. There will be an airship at the Sky Pier under the name Sophia Breggas, use that for the escape.”

Martin's actions were ruthless. He abandoned his duties under the eyes of countless soldiers and commanders and fled south after deserting his own corp. There was no way that the battle would be

able to continue after the head commander had acted in this manner.

The central unit that possessed the most powerful military might of the entire allied forces quickly fell. Several commanders that chose to remain behind attempted to consolidate their own forces to stand against the devils and the Order of the Iron Blood Knights, but it was a meaningless resistance.

The Devil Army quickly overtook central headquarters and tried to take hold of the entire Harupaya Ridge.

“ ... ”

Sungchul watched the tide of battle turn increasingly bleak without a word. However, he was not the only one watching silently. The dwarves and elves who were in high spirits from their victory at the beginning of the battle were also watching the situation in silence.

Any chance of overturning the battle had disappeared when Martin fled. The right flank had betrayed them, and the main forces had fallen. All that remained was the left flank, but they were also fated to be overwhelmed by their enemy.

The commander of the allied forces of the Storm Battlefront that was left in charge of the left flank, Armuk Bakr, sounded the retreat, but no one moved from their posts. They stood resolutely as trees and boulders formed through the ages.

“If we die, we die here.”

“Humans may have a place to fall back to, but we have nowhere else to go.”

The battle had turned bleak, but it could not break the spirits of the dwarves and elves. They let out a roar as they tempered their fighting spirits and poured out fierce opposition against the devils. The surviving human forces of the central unit soon joined the left wing, but the tipped scale of battle could not be overturned.

The Devils leisurely surrounded the allied Dwarven-Elven forces who were entrenched within the tall mountains and began preparation for a final assault. It was at this moment when a monstrous roar rang out from the skies. The people turned to where the sound came from and began to point and shout toward the sky.

“D-dragon!”

“A dragon appeared!”

A massive dragon covered in black scales appeared within the ranks of the Devil Army. The identity of the black dragon was the half-dragon, Kha'nes. The most powerful hermit within the Tower of Recluse.

‘Now that I was getting ready to do some work, the Demon Realm Battlefield is falling apart. What’s up with that?’

Kha'nes who had been dispatched to find the cause of the altered Calamity had been procrastinating by exploring popular eateries and arrived late to the Demon Realm Battlefront only to discover that it was crawling with devils. She was attempting to move to someplace without devils and found herself involved in the battle at Harupaya Ridge.

“Where did all those fucking humans go?! Huh?”

Kha'nes shouted with a thunderous voice as she struck out with her tail and claw to ruthlessly slice apart the devils who were an inferior existence to her.

“How is it fair that I have to step in because they couldn't even stop a few garbage demons?” bellowed the dragon.

The battle potential of dragons, the most powerful race, was indeed fearsome. Even Balroqs that were terrifying existence to humans were turned to ash once met with her breath. How would the lesser devils below them fare?

After Kha'nes ripped enough devils apart, she rose back up into the sky to launch another breath attack. Massive demon beasts and Hell Siege Engines melted under the flames. The Devils tried to retaliate with their crossbows and catapults, but they could not penetrate through Kha'nes' scales. She was unmatched.

However, even Kha'nes was not invincible.

‘Oh, my. I’m starting to feel a bit peckish.’

As a half-dragon, she could turn into a dragon at any time, but there was a time limit. She felt her reserved strength hitting its limits and retreated from the battlefield.

“Smell you later, devils!”

Kha’nes began to swiftly fly south after having her fill of rampage, leaving behind mountains of devil and war machine remains. Unfortunately, she only managed to cut down a portion of their forces. This was nothing more than a small incident that delayed their assault in their eyes.

After Kha’nes left, the devils consolidated their forces once again and began their advance to wipe out the remnants of the allied forces. The Mobile Fortress that was the dependable bastion of the humans stood at the front of the charge.

It was a literal castle with eight legs attached to it made possible through magical engineering. This free-moving mobile fortress was the greatest asset of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights displaying oppressive defensive and offensive might.

The mobile fortress absorbed the dwarven artillery fire with its body and moved all the way up to the foot of the mountain before open firing toward the dwarves. Dozens of cannons opened fire onto the dwarven encampment and landed a strong blow against them. The dwarves tried their best to retaliate, but they were

vastly outnumbered. Combined with the Hell Siege Engines from the other fronts, the siege units that the dwarves were so proud of were being demolished one by one. Sungchul tried his best by destroying a few of the Hell Siege Engines with his Meteor, but it was impossible to turn the battle with his efforts alone.

When the dwarven artillery was neutralized, the devils began to attack from the skies. The winged devils began their assault en masse but the Elven archers dropped them from the skies. But because their attention was focused above, the Devil Army on the ground was no longer impeded in their march toward the mountain.

Dwarves could only helplessly watch as the dark tide of devils that had filled the horizon began to climb toward them as to swallow them whole.

“Looks like this is it.”

Several gryphons tore through the devils to escape into the skies. Several commanders and VIPs that had to survive were being evacuated. Kaal Bomba readily handed his own gryphon to Sungchul.

“Ride this and escape human mage.”

“Why would you do this for me?”

When Sungchul asked out of surprise, Kaal raised his axe

mightily and laughed with a smirk.

“I feel as though you will be a greater help to future battles than I. I have never seen a mage destroy Hell Siege Engines that well!”

He did not look back toward Sungchul before running toward the frontlines. He joined the bloody battle with a roar.

“ ... ”

Sungchul gave a bow toward the dwarf’s direction to show his gratitude before hopping onto the gryphon. It gave a sharp cry before it began to flap its massive wings and flew toward the sky. Winged devils attempted to overtake the gryphon, but it easily clawed and pecked its way to the blue sky.

Sungchul could see the battlefield much more easily from up above. The mountain range in which the allied force of dwarves and elves remained was completely surrounded, and the final bastion of the Demon Battlefront that was Harupaya Ridge had been taken. It now looked like nothing could stop the invasion of the Devils.

The gryphon that carried Sungchul landed by a lake not far from the battlefield. The commanders and VIPs that had escaped the battlefield were already resting by this lake.

“Damned... That damned...”

Armuk Bakr that had been in charge of the left flank was among them. The man who had managed to earn the trust of the dwarves despite being a human and had climbed to the position of one of the commanding generals of the allied forces was furious as he watched his comrades currently being slaughtered on the mountain range with eyes filled with sorrow.

“I’ll kill him. Martin Breggas. I vow to AT LEAST kill that bastard.”

The Omens of Calamity were flapping their massive wings as they leisurely glided above the battlefield. They were a rare sight to see this far back from the front lines. It meant that the Calamity had drawn that much closer to this land.

Sungchul turned to look toward the road. There was an endless procession of refugees on the road stretching south. One of the Omen of Calamity discovered this mass of refugees and descended upon them with its talon flared claws. The helpless refugees were nothing but fodder for the beast of the Demon Realm.

The Omen of Calamity pinned a refugee with its massive claw and tore off the waist of another with its beak in order to swallow him whole.

The refugees hollered and fled, but there was nothing more they could do. The guards tried to fend off the Omen of Calamity, but it only made a few gestures with its wing as to show its annoyance before escaping into the sky.

The sound of a horn flute could be heard from the distant mountain range.

“...”

Sungchul who had been sitting powerless on the rock like the other stragglers suddenly rose from his seat. Armuk who had been cursing Martin Breggas looked over at him.

‘Huh, that guy is?’

He had definitely seen that face before. He dug through his memory to the festival in Golden City that was held to welcome the Summoned in order to recall a man with a similar face and attire.

“You. I remember. You were one of the Summoned in Golden City, weren’t you?”

He acted as though he was familiar with Sungchul as he approached. However, an elegant hammer with a long handle appeared in Sungchul’s hands in the next moment. Armuk’s jaw dropped the moment he saw the hammer. It was Fal Garaz. The hammer forged from a fragment of the sky; a divine artifact of the dwarves.

“G-gulp!”

Armuk who had been approaching him amicably fell back in shock.

“ ... ”

Sungchul's indifferent gaze turned in his direction. Armuk felt enough pressure to cause his heart to explode.

Sungchul walked forward with Fal Garaz in hand toward the direction of the horn flute. Divine strength gathered in his legs. His slow moving feet suddenly couldn't be seen as he headed toward the battlefield at an unbelievable speed.

‘Boom!’

Sungchul's godlike figure appeared at the crossroad of Harupaya Ridge; evoking a cloud of dust in his wake.

“Huh?”

The Devils over the ridge were already alarmed at his arrival, but they couldn't react to the hammer flying towards them in time.

‘Bam! Wham!’

One man stepped over two bloodied corpses as he revealed himself to the devils. The devils didn't quite recognize the man's face that held the hammer, but they recognized the hammer and what the man holding this hammer represented.

“D-demolisher!”

That cry instantly spread among the devils. Unprecedented terror filled the eyes of a hundred thousand devils. Sungchul stood alone in the front as he looked down upon them.

“...”

The man called the Demolisher, the Enemy of the World, engaged the hundred thousand devils on the hill. There was only one man standing in their way, but none of the devils dared to meet his challenge so foolishly.

There were a few that were watching this scene from a distance. Each of the gathered that saw the face of the man reflected onto the scrying orb reacted to his presence in their own way. One of them, in particular, was quite shocked.

‘What in the world... it can’t be!’

Sujin looked with astonishment at the man in the scrying orb with both her hands covering her mouth.

‘You are the Enemy of the World?!’

Chapter 100 – Facing Them Alone (4)

Sungchul's presence had a different weight compared to the appearance of Kha'nes the Half-Dragon. The flow of battle instantly changed. The haughty devils that had been preparing for victory instantly reeled back in fear at the appearance of their bane, and the devil army that had been ready to snuff out the Dwarf-Elf allied forces immediately ceased their assault and turned back toward the unexpected appearance of this era's superhuman. Prontorowa, ranked eighth in the Demon Realm, was not pleased with this situation.

“Why are you so scared? Your opponent is a mere human. Do you think it's right for the proud demon race to be terrorized by a mere human?”

The Devil that had lived over ten thousand years had yet to see Sungchul personally, and this was why he was able to maintain a cool disposition compared to the other devils. Prontorowa gestured with his emaciated hand and relentlessly gave out orders.

“Send out the Demon Beast unit!”

Massive monsters appeared amongst the devils. A group of mutated Tam Tams stood at the vanguard. These monsters, which were a demonized version of the giant monkey Tam Tam, revealed their bloody teeth and roared.

“Go!”

The low-rank devil soldiers cut the metallic chains that restrained the mutant Tam Tam. The monster first tore apart the tamer that had abused it then drank his blood before heading toward Sungchul's direction.

‘Boom!’

Followed by a quaking force, the mutant Tam Tam that had landed gathered his hands to strike toward the tiny human standing tall below him. The moment its fists reached Sungchul, Fal Garaz moved with blinding speed. The Tam Tam's skull reacted to the swing of the hammer before its eyes could.

‘Boom!’

The massive monkey fell backwards with a shattered skull. Sungchul grabbed the leg of the gigantic mutant Tam Tam that was several dozen times larger than himself and threw it toward the devils watching the spectacle. The mutant Tam Tam corpse that carried the momentum of his divine strength flew at a low angle before bouncing off the ground and rolling through the demon army.

‘Boom! Boom! Boom!’

The corpse only managed to stop after flattening countless devils along the way.

“J-just what is that?”

“Is he human? Is that THING still human?”

The fighting spirit of the devils who had only heard rumors of the Demolisher took a huge blow.

“Push on with numbers! That bastard is a human, so he’ll just get tired like that dragon a while ago!”

Prontorowa flinched at Sungchul’s display of might, but he still wasn’t completely intimidated. He ordered the entire army to move toward Sungchul. The main force that had been attacking the Dwarf-Elf allied force now descended the mountain range and stood in formation before Sungchul. Winged devils of all different kinds gathered below the hovering Omen of Calamity, like a thick black storm cloud covering the sky.

“The Devil King has spoken. The one that kills the Demolisher will be given 2nd rank within the Demon Realm and power to befit that rank! Anyone willing, go take the Demolisher’s life and glory shall follow!”

Prontorowa ordered his entire military might toward Sungchul. Excessive rewards managed to abate the terror to a certain degree, and the memory of that dragon that fled in exhaustion after its rampage was still fresh on their minds. As Sungchul was still human, they believed that he too must have a limit and eventually reach a point of exhaustion. Not to mention that their forces had a hundred thousand devils. According to Prontorowa’s calculations, he would be able to put an end to Sungchul’s legend at the sacrifice

of just ten thousand devils.

‘Buoooooh~’

The Devil’s horn flute indicating the advance rang out bleakly throughout the entirety of Harupaya Ridge. The Devil forces that surrounded Sungchul had begun their assault.

At the front of the charge were the Fallen Trolls who were smaller than Demonic Beasts, but still considerably large. The giants swung clubs as large as a fully grown adult human as they attacked Sungchul. The earth trembled when these massive creatures moved together in a group.

“Hiiii...Why was I chosen by a person like this.”

Bertelgia was letting out shrieks of terror from Sungchul’s pocket. On the other hand, Sungchul looked at the approaching trolls with a calm gaze. He raised his foot slightly when they came close.

“ ... ”

Divine strength was instilled into his feet, and the slightly raised foot struck the ground once.

‘Booooooom!’

A force on a different level than one caused by the drumming of the troll's feet struck the earth. The ground did not only tremble but shook violently.

The trolls began to lose their footing in the intense tremor that resembled an earthquake. A dark light pierced through the formation of the trolls like lightning.

‘Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!’

One blow for one troll. Fal Garaz's brutal blow popped each of the trolls' heads. Twenty Trolls fell to the ground in a matter of moments, but Sungchul was still not satisfied. He entered the military base of the devils who had been holding their breath and watching the battle behind the trolls. He ceaselessly moved Fal Garaz in order to blow away all the nuisance in his way.

‘Boom!’

Dozens of devils flew away at each strike of the hammer, and that sort of hammering continued at several times per second. The immediate area around Sungchul turned into a no man's land within 10 seconds. All that remained were splatters of blood and flesh, but not a single drop was on Sungchul's clothes nor was his breath ragged. He continued looking indifferent as he looked down toward the devils and fixed his grip on his hammer.

“...M-monster!”

“That... is not human.”

It was then when the devils realized it. They could not overcome the human standing before their eyes nor should they try to overcome him. It was not a matter of numbers, but their realization had come much too late.

Sungchul now entered the ranks of the Order of the Iron Blood Knights. He began another round of one-sided slaughter. The mobile fortress that the Order had been so proud of instantly lost half of its leg and sat in a twisted form onto the ground.

Sungchul, after silencing the Order of the Iron Blood Knights, immediately aimed for the Balroq or Baal or other such high rank Devils hiding amongst the low rank ones. He didn't stop at simply killing those devils. He grabbed the horns of Balroqs to pry off their heads and grated the faces of Baals onto the rocky surface of the ground to kill them.

Everywhere Sungchul went, blood was spilled and mountains of corpses were formed. Not even 5 minutes passed before around ten thousand devils were slaughtered.

“W-what the fuck! Just what is that?”

When Prontorowa the high rank devil heard the news that Hesthnius Max had thrown away his physical form to escape from Sungchul, he had mocked the Demon King, calling him a coward who lacked the fundamentals of a demon. But little by little he was forced to see differently, until now when Sungchul headed straight

for him and completely changed his opinion.

“Are you the head of these devils?”

The human, without a drop of blood on him or breath out of place, stood tall before Prontorowa. When that human looked at him indifferently without any emotion in his eyes, Prontorowa felt a strong compulsion to bend his knee and beg for his life, but his pride as a High Devil stopped him. Instead, he managed to muster up some dignity as he opened his mouth.

“T-That’s right, you lowly human!”

Sungchul’s response to the devil was Fal Garaz. As the hammer rose, Prontorowa tried to call out every magic known to him, but the hammer moved faster than his lips. Fal Garaz’s head met Prontorowa’s mouth. His jaw bone flew out of his skull, and his tongue that had been bent like a snake was pulled out in its entirety after being caught by the hammer.

“Kuuu....”

The leader of a hundred thousand devils met his end without being able to put up any resistance. Sungchul scraped off the disgusting offal from his hammer and looked toward the devils before putting up a serious question.

“... Who’s next.”

None of the devils dared to meet him. Hundred thousand... no, now a number much lower than that fell back in retreat leaving behind a single man on an empty battlefield.

—

“Sungchul, that bastard. How did he get that strong? The bastard’s strength is on a different level than the Sungchul we knew.”

Executor Aquiroa spat out profanities as she looked away from the scrying orb.

“...Definitely powerful. Even Kha’nes who is known as the most powerful recluse would be no match for him.”

Shamal was of a similar opinion. Currently, no one could stop Sungchul. This gathering of powerful people in an undisclosed location was now coming to a consensus.

“There is now a need to utilize every method known to us to stop that beast.”

There was a sense of urgency in Aquiroa’s voice. If that monster managed to reach the Devil King, his life would forfeit and according to the Scroll of Calamity, the Seven Heroes would awaken at the death of the Devil King. Not one, but seven individuals whose strength were known to be equal to or exceeding the Devil King would awaken. The chaos wrought at their hands

would be unprecedented. At the very least, that had to be stopped.

Aquiroa and the others each held their own thoughts as they returned to their territories. The only ones now remaining were Shamal Rajput and his subordinates. Shamal looked at the young man assimilated into the shadows with vacant eyes as he spoke.

“...How is it, Kaz Almeida? Can you do it?”

Kaz shook his head at Shamal’s question.

“That is not an opponent I can beat. I feel that it is rather a blessing to have survived an attack of such an existence and lived.”

Kaz who had been burning with vengeance could feel its flames simmer as he witnessed Sungchul’s divine might.

Shamal turned his head toward Sujin.

“How about you?”

She couldn’t reply to his question for a brief moment. It was because it was difficult for her to accept the identity of the Enemy of the World.

‘If that man was the Enemy of the World, just what have I done? Why did I not recognize that the man was the Enemy of the World? If it was going to be this way, why did I even bother

coming back in time?’

Shame had enveloped her heart in darkness. She only managed to regain her senses after Shamal called out her name a second time.

“Ahmuge. I asked your thoughts.”

Suijn finally realized that Shamal was calling out to her, and spoke out in surprise.

“I can’t handle him yet.”

Sujin replied as such, but she was different than Kaz. She looked directly at Shamal as she spoke in an unperturbed manner.

“However, when the opportunity arises and if I manage to get the strength to pierce his heart, I will be able to put an end to the Calamity that he will bring.”

A faint smile rose and left Shamal’s lips. He could still remember it clearly. The moment when he had met the woman called Ahmuge. It was at the the Castle of the Assassin’s Guild, also known as the ‘Forbidden Palace’. An intruder had managed sneak into the sect leader’s sleeping quarters located at the center of the castle without being detected.

The woman boldly held a cheap dagger aimed at Shamal Rajput known as the King of all Assassins. Shamal realized Ahmuge’s

existence only when the end of her cold blade had touched his neck. This accomplishment wasn't brought about by strength nor ability, but rather a privilege that could only be earned by those with the unseen blessings, divine blessings, or similar soul contracts. Shamal could see Ahmuge's usefulness as an assassin in a single glance and lent his ear to her story.

Her future had been different compared to those that crossed through the threshold of time for their own personal benefit. There were some amusing and shocking details within. The particular detail about Sungchul, his old comrade, being the one to bring the end of the world was enough to draw the cold blooded Shamal's interest.

"I came from the future to kill him. The Enemy of the World. Killing that man is the life mission which I cannot be dissuaded from and also the sole reason I have come to live in this foreign world."

Ahmuge or Sujin Lee bowed as she spoke with resolve. Shamal nodded and looked toward the north with vacant eyes.

"When the time comes, an opportunity will arrive. However, the time is not now. But do not fret. Your heart's desire will come to pass soon."

Shamal disappeared in a puff of smoke after those words.

At the same hour, Sungchul was now situated in the middle of Harupaya Ridge in between two hostile factions. In front of him

was the brazen devil army that was still occupying the wilderness, but they didn't dare to attack Sungchul. The problem was the factions situated behind him.

“Enemy of the World! Return Fal Garaz! Only then will we spare your life!”

They were the survivors of the dwarf, elf, and human allied forces that had been fighting alongside him just a moment ago. They spat out every threat and insult they could muster first, then followed up with arrows and catapults.

Sungchul looked at his former comrades attacking him with disinterest. A single arrow split his hair and stuck onto the ground.

“ ... ”

He knew that it would end this way, and that was why he was hesitant. Hesitant to help his fellow fighters that were fighting with him under the same banner.

“This is too much. Really. Why are they acting like this? Even after you saved them?”

Bertelgia asked, her angry voice filled with frustration.

“Why are they doing this to you?”

It was then that a massive artillery shot, fired from the dwarven camp, flew past Sungchul and caused a large explosion. When the explosion subsided, Sungchul was visible again without so much as a scratch on his clothing.

Sungchul raised Fal Garaz high into the air and struck the ground. Powerful quakes shook the earth, and the artillery placed on the unsteady ground fell over causing a massive explosion.

The dwarf-elf allied forces were scared stiff by his actions and retreated.

Sungchul who had managed to shut them up looked toward the devil army still stationed within the wilderness as he stood his ground at the peak of Harupaya Ridge. The wind blowing down from the mountain rustled his clothing and hair gently as it blew past.

Once silence fell over the battlefield, Sungchul looked down toward it and spoke in a firm voice.

“This is my fate.”